



Guest

Dr. Jennifer (Jen) Goldman Wetzler is a leading expert on Conflict and Organizational psychology. For two decades, she has advised senior leaders at global corporations in a wide range of industries as well as at large non-profit and governmental institutions. She is the author of *Optimal Outcomes - Free yourself from conflict at Work, at Home and in life*. Earlier in her career, she was Director of Negotiation Programs at Mediation Works Incorporated, and a facilitator at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. A former counterterrorism research fellow with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, she received her B.A. with honors from Tufts University and holds a Ph.D. in Social-Organizational Psychology from Columbia University.

When I reflect on my journey, I feel I often default to a conflict-avoiding approach which I find to be frequently counter-productive in situations. Jen speaks about the various defaults each one of us gravitate towards and how that leads us to being stuck in conflict. How we engage in conflict is such a critical skill that shapes the quality of our experiences and outcomes at home and at work. Something that is so essential but never gets discussed in a productive way.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 73rd Conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. I am your host Deepak Jayaraman. This podcast is my labour of love for the long term to have conversations with leading practitioners, thinkers, authors, artists, sportsmen and other leading professionals to decode insights around leadership, transitions and careers.

When I am not podcasting, I am working with leaders as a Trusted Sounding Board helping leaders and organizations play to their fullest potential. To know more about what is in the podcast archives and the advisory work I do, you could just visit www.playtopotential.com

My guest this time Dr. Jennifer Goldman-Wetzler, a leading expert on conflict and organizational psychology, is founder and CEO of Alignment Strategies Group, and author of *OPTIMAL OUTCOMES: Free Yourself from Conflict at Work, at Home, and in Life* (HarperBusiness, 2020), selected as a Financial Times Book of the Month. For two decades, she has advised senior leaders at global corporations in a wide range of industries as well as at large non-profit and governmental institutions. Earlier in her career, she was a facilitator at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. She is a former counterterrorism research fellow with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and she received her B.A. with honors from Tufts University and holds a Ph.D. in Social-Organizational Psychology from Columbia University.

Without further ado, let us listen and learn from Dr Jen Goldman Wetzler.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Jen, thanks so much for your time on the Play to Potential Podcast, excited to be talking to you.

Dr. Jennifer Goldman (JG): Thank you so much Deepak, it is great to be here with you.

DJ: In this podcast, we talk about people's journeys and insights around Leadership, Transitions and Careers. Before we dive into the book you have written around conflict resolution Jen, I would love to get a sense of the arc of your curiosity and how you ended up researching conflict. So if it is okay with you, I would love to get a sense of how you ended up writing this book and the sequence of events leading up to it.

JG: Absolutely. Well, it is important always I think to start from the beginning and that starts with my two grandmothers. So when I was growing up, I had grandma Florence who was what I call our family's first conflict whisperer. So I grew up in a family of screamers and door slammers and grandma Florence was really the opposite of that. She was so calm. Just by her very presence, she could just calm us down. And so we would often drive my brother and me in the backseat and my parents in the front seat. We would drive from our little red brick building in the Bronx each Sunday to my aunt and uncle's house in the Connecticut suburbs. And my grandma Florence would sit in the middle of me and my brother in the backseat. And there would be inevitably screaming every which way in the car on the way home and grandma Florence just by saying shh, shh, quiet, quiet, she would in her very calm Yiddish way really just calmed everybody down somehow. And on the other side of my family, my Oma, my grandmother, Helen and my grandfather, my Opa, Hans, they had immigrated to America from Vienna, Austria but it took them six years of the journey through Switzerland and Portugal and Italy and eventually to the Dominican Republic where my father was born during the war and then once the war ended, they were able to come to New York. So they went through a lot of traumatic experiences over those years. My grandfather never saw his father or one of his brothers again. The rest of his brothers ended up moving to Australia and thankfully, we were safe but were far-flung for the rest of their lives. And so I think out of that trauma came a lot of grief that was unprocessed and kind of turned into anger. And so there is a legacy of grief and anger in that side of the family. And so I think it was for me the combination of growing up in a family of the anger and the screaming and the model of my grandma Florence that really enabled me to be in the eye of the storm with people who are in conflict and to be able to be that conflict whisperer for them. And that has been true for me and my family as I have gotten older in my family today and also with friends and colleagues and obviously was my clients as well. So that is just the beginning of the journey. And then when I got to beyond college, you know, in college decided to study conflict resolution. It was just something I was naturally drawn to and then I went to go study in Jerusalem for my junior year abroad of college which is in many ways, you know, it is called the city of peace but I think it should really be called the city of diversity or the city of conflicts as well. So I really learned about international conflict there and identity conflict there. And then my whole career for 25 years has been focused on negotiation, conflict. I began my career at the program on negotiation at Harvard Law School and at several organizations affiliated with it in Boston, Massachusetts. And then I came back to New York where I am from originally to do my PhD in Social and Organizational Psychology with a focus on Intractable Conflict where I studied Humiliation. So all of my work at Columbia where I was studying was funded by the US Department of Homeland Security because I was looking at how does the emotion of humiliation drive or exacerbate long-term conflicts. And I began my research in 2002 when the US Department of Homeland Security had

just been founded after 9/11. And so they had just created a new fellowship program and had invited me to apply. So I did and they funded my work for five years. And then I came out and I realized I had been studying how we get stuck in long-term conflicts and all the complex factors that contribute to that. I knew I could spend the rest of my life just looking at the ways we get stuck and I said to myself, I need to pivot, I need to look at how can we get out of these long-term conflicts. And so the last 14 years of my life has been spent looking at how can we get out of these conflicts that seem to go around and around and around and how can we stay out, how can we free ourselves from these kinds of situations. So I have been working, I founded an organization called Alignment Strategies Group where we help CEOs and their senior teams to collaborate across lines of difference and across lines of differences of worldview of opinion and to create optimal outcomes for themselves and their teams as a result of having those tough conversations.

DJ: And maybe just before we dive into the book, Jen, could you define what is conflict and maybe shine the light on healthy conflict.

JG: Yeah. Well, conflict can be healthy when it happens once and people can talk about what is happening and then figure out a way forward, right. A ton of research has been done that shows that when people come from diverse perspectives, have different points of view, they talk about it that can lead to more innovative solutions, more creative solutions, so, you know, one-off conflict can be a healthy thing. But when you find that you are going around and around and having the same argument with someone over and over again or it is not the same argument, it is about different content pieces but the nature of it is the same, right, where you are blaming me and I am blaming you back, even if one day we are talking about the dishes and the next day we are talking about a PowerPoint presentation or whatever, but the pattern is similar, blame blame. In that case, this becomes unproductive, unhealthy, not useful and that is my work, is to say, how can we help ourselves, how can we help ourselves get off of that, what I call conflict loop.

DJ: So let us talk about the conflict loop, Jen. You actually say that we end up getting into a vicious loop and we struggle to get out of it, can you talk a little bit about what the conflict loop is and of course we will talk at length about how we get out of this but it would be good to talk about the conflict loop first.

JG: Sure. When we are stuck in conflict, we have got our conflict habit that interacts with other people's conflict habits and those conflict habits form a pattern of interaction and they tend to get locked in this pattern of interaction. And so if you think about this like a circle, that is just a never-ending circle, it just goes around and around and around, you can imagine yourself stuck on this conflict loop and the question that all of my work today really deals with is, how do we interrupt, put a break in this pattern so that we can have a little space to move and ask ourselves, how can I get off of this conflict loop.

DJ: Hmm. And you talk about common conflict habits and you break them into four, you briefly spoke about one of them but could you sort of lay out the framework here Jen in a way this is sort of the underlying foundation based on which we start realizing where we are coming from and where the other person is coming from? So if you could talk a little bit about the four different approaches to conflict that we end up gravitating towards.

JG: Yes. So there are four conflict habits. One of them is one that I mentioned before which is that some of us in our quest to win a conflict, we might feel competitive and this can be a healthy thing. But when we take it to an extreme and we habitually want to win a conflict, it can get to the point where other people end up experiencing us as blaming them. And so we will kind of go on the attack and blame other people. In contrast, others of us habitually blame ourselves, we may blame and

shame ourselves. So again, we may do this with good intentions. So our intention may be to learn from a situation and do better next time. But when we habitually do this, sometimes we end up stewing in our own negative self-talk which does not free us from any kind of conflict whatsoever, it just keeps us stuck in that conflict situation. The third conflict habit is shut-down and that is where we may again well intentionally avoid a conflict situation which can be a helpful way to deal with conflict when, for example, the issue is not that important to you or the person you are dealing with is not that important to you and so avoidance can be useful. But again, when that is the only way that we know how to deal with conflict and we are avoiding issues that are important or were avoiding people whose relationships are important to us, then it becomes an unhealthy way to deal with conflicts. And what typically happens is that the conflict, you know, we will avoid, avoid, avoid, avoid, the conflict is kind of bubbling slowly, simmering, simmering, simmering and then boom, you know, it explodes at a point when we least expected and then we have to go deal with that and we are not prepared. And then finally, one of the other ones that we talked about before is relentlessly collaborate. And that is where we have been taught often like we were saying before from a young age that the way to deal with conflict is to offer other people options, think about what their interests might be, come up with creative solutions, work with them to come up with those creative solutions. And again, that is a really excellent toolbox and skill set to have. And for so many millennia, people did not have that way of thinking about dealing with conflict and we got into all sorts of messes because we did not have that that skill set. But even that, people can get so tied and committed to using this collaborative skill set that we end up pouring energy, time, resources, money into trying to work things out with someone or a group of people who just are not interested in collaborating or cooperating with us. And so, there is all that, you know, wasted time, money, energy, resources down the drain. And so, there has got to be a better way. So actually there is a free quiz online that people can take if they are interested to find out which one of these four conflict habits is your default. And if you go to optimaloutcomesbook.com/assessment, you will find the quiz and you can take it. It is fun and helps people figure it out quickly.

DJ: I am sure and I guess to your point, you know, blaming, shutting down and shaming, have a negative connotation. But as you say, collaboration has a positive connotation in most situations, so it is quite counterintuitive to hear that it could sort of be a limiting factor in us getting to a meaningful place. Could you talk a little bit about maybe what sorts of circumstances lead us to one of these four clusters? I am sure each journey is unique but are there kinds of situations that lead people to eventually gravitate towards one of these four buckets?

JG: Yes, typically these habits are formed based on how we grew up. And not necessarily by our family of origin, although very commonly that is, you know, what we see modelled by our families is often what we pick up about how we are supposed to deal with conflict. So I have often had clients say to me, you know, in my family, we just avoided conflict. It was a very quiet dinner table. There was no conflict but that does not mean that conflict did not exist. You know, what my point to them is, that does not mean conflict did not exist, it just means that people's way of dealing with it was to not deal with it. Similarly, like I was saying before about relentlessly collaborating, you know, I learned as a 20 year old, in my first company that I worked with called Interaction Associates, it was very big on collaboration and taught people how to collaborate with each other and so I think a lot of people learn that when you are in a work environment. But you could certainly learn from a young age how to deal with conflict from things that you learn at school from teachers or from other family members or from religious figures in your life, you know, but we typically pick these things up without realizing that we are picking them up from a pretty young age.

DJ: Got it. And as I was reading your book, Jen, what I found interesting was, you know, mathematically speaking if we sort of take the fact that we could fall into one of the four conflict habits and the person on the other side could be one of the four, it leads to 16 sort of permutations.

But I noticed that in your book, you say that there are five patterns which are more common than the rest, blame shame, blame shutdown, relentlessly collaborate shutdown, shutdown shutdown and blame blame. As I eyeballed it, I got the sense that blame and shutdown are possibly more commonly found among people than the rest, would that be a fair way of understanding the context here?

JG: I thought that was such an interesting insight, you wrote me that before we spoke and I remember that and I think that is a really interesting insight, I have to say I do not know. I have not done the analysis on people who have taken the quiz to see if there are major differences and I can and should potentially do that, all the data is completely anonymous and we do have the data, so I should look at it and do that analysis, my sense though just anecdotally having worked with thousands of people who are my students at Columbia and also clients in all kinds of corporate and academic and non-profit and governmental environments, is that feels to me like that is a pretty even break down. So I have, over the last 10 years, done an exercise on the first night of the three-day workshop that I gave at Columbia for graduate students on Optimal Outcomes and I have people self-identify, this was before I created the quiz online and so, people would self-identify in one of these four conflict habits groups. And generally speaking, those four corners of the room that I would send people to, were pretty evenly distributed. So I am not sure that it is about that. The best thing I can chalk it up to is that there are certain patterns that are easier to get locked into than others. And so for example blame shame is a perfect example of this where if you have a conflict habit of you shame yourself, you blame yourself, you might be naturally drawn to someone to be in relationship with someone who is a blamer. That is a very natural pattern to get stuck in, the blamer will be naturally attracted to you and you will be naturally attracted to them because you are already shaming yourself and you are going to find someone who is going to kind of lay it on you, that is what you attract and a blamer needs someone who is going to allow them to blame them, allow the person to blame. So I think that is more how it works. Same thing with blame blame, you know, like in my family and I talk about this very honestly in the book, my mom and I were stuck in a blame blame pattern for many many years and, you know, that was not fun or easy but it does kind of make sense. I grew up in my parents' home and there was a lot of screaming and yelling. And so as much as I had my grandma Florence as that model of how to deal with conflict which was to stay calm and allow, you know, she was the eye of the storm for others, I also had this model of blaming and anger and so I know how to do that really well too. And so I think blamers can also find each other and that is a really sticky pattern conflict loop to get stuck in as well. So those were just two examples, does that help, is that helpful...?

DJ: Yeah absolutely. I think that is a great insight. It is not so much about the incidence of these five types but probably the stickiness of these kinds of conflict patterns which possibly makes them stand out for you. So I think that is an interesting nuance. I had not quite processed it that way. I think moving on Jen, you talk about the notion of listening and you talk about the importance of understanding the nuances of the conflict situation you are in and you say that when we are in conflict, there is a tendency to get binary in the way we read the situation. Could you talk a little bit more? I found that supremely insightful.

JG: Yes. Right. So exactly what you said, when we are stuck in conflict, our attention tends to narrow in focus and this helps us when we are in a really difficult physical situation, right. If you are facing the face of a tiger, you want to either fight or flee and so it can help to really narrow your focus on what is in front of you, the problem that is in front of you and then, you know, almost in a reflex kind of way figure out what you are going to do. The problem is that when we are facing a more modern, less physically threatening situation, conflict is typically much more complex than that. And so a situation that can seem, like it is just about you and me and it is just about what I say and what you say or what you do and what I do, can actually be more complex and so when we do not allow

ourselves to notice that complexity surrounding the situation or that is a part of the situation, we lose the opportunity to gain valuable insight about the nuances and about the influencing factors that exist that could actually serve as important levers for change in that situation. So there is a practice that I have used for 10 years that I originally learned from one of my professors, from my advisor, Dr. Peter Coleman who runs the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University in New York. And it is a great practice that people can do even in two minutes. I have seen people have major light bulbs go off and major aha moments from doing this practice. So basically what you do is you start with a blank piece of paper and you can also do this online. In fact, if people want to go to optimaloutcomesbook.com/map, you can find a way to do this online. There is some very cool online mapping software that that we found that is available for free on the website. But you take out a blank piece of paper and the first step is just put down the names of the people who are involved in whatever situation is occurring for you. So that might be, you know, if you and I, Deepak were involved in some kind of situation that was hard for us to deal with, I would put your name and my name down on the map and then I would put circles around each of our names and I would have a line between us to show that we are in relationship with each other. Then I would ask myself to get creative and think about who else is involved in this situation. Well, maybe there is, you know, the person that you report to and the person that I report to and then there is all the people who report to either each of us and then there is my family of origin and that is your family of origin and they might influence the way that each of us tends to approach problems and our thinking and our ways of dealing with conflict and I would put them on the map. So I start to really get creative and think about what is influencing this situation, what other factors, what other ideas, what is influencing and also influenced by this situation and put that on the map as well. So the next step is to get really even more creative and put on your map anything that would be helping you think about this situation in a different way than you have before. So I have seen people put colors on their map and names of emotions on their map and stars and hearts and to show relationships that are not doing well or that are very loving, anything that can help you view the situation in a different way, put on your map. And then the final step in this practice is you just take a step back and observe your map and ask yourself, what story does this map tell that might be different from the story I was telling myself about the situation before I drew my map. And typically again, there is, you know, insights, often people, for example, a very common insight is oh well, I did not realize that the way this person has been treating me that I have had such trouble with I cannot stand but I feel so micromanaged for example, right, that is like a very common complaint in workplaces, my manager is just micromanaging me and I cannot stand it. I have had someone like literally within two minutes of doing this practice say oh, I just noticed that my manager may be feeling micromanaged by her manager. And that does not take away the pain that I have experienced over the last many months of feeling micromanaged but it does help explain why she may be doing this. And it can give me a little bit of empathy for her in a way that I just was not able to access before.

DJ: Gives perspective I guess to what is going on.

JG: Yes.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. Picking up from what Jennifer says, I do think when we are deep into conflict, we end up seeing things in a binary, fight, flight or fright prism and that is possibly due to the several thousand years of evolution. It is worth thinking about how we look at the situation with nuance rather than embracing a simplistic story line. Something similar came up with my conversation with Jennifer Garvey Berger (JGB), Author of the Book – *Unlocking Leadership*

Mindtraps. She speaks about 5 common traps a lot of us tend to fall into and one of the traps she talks about is the trap of falling for simplistic stories.

JGB: *"Well, so we become, we kind of fall in love with our own conclusions and we fall in love with our own stories without even noticing their stories. You could hear it in our language like your people said, well, it's obvious that or it's totally clear that, I hear it in my language all the time and almost never is it actually obvious the thing that I am talking about and so forcing ourselves to listen to when we have a simple story. Like it's obvious what the government should do here, completely not obvious what any government should do right now, completely not obvious. And so when we hear ourselves interacting with a complex set of ideas as though it were simple, then we know that we are in this trap. And so I think the solution there is to be able to construct a series of alternate stories not to confuse us but in a kind of almost a scenario planning way, not to try and get the right one but to try to help us understand that there are these multiple possibilities, none of them are likely to be a 100 percent right and to help us create a kind of a flexibility of our thinking that will hold us in good stead."*

DJ: I guess most situations are more nuanced and complex than we think they initially are. Taking the time and creating the space to assimilate the entire context might be helpful in us understanding the plot with all its nuances.

If this is of interest, you might like my conversation with Rich Fernandez, CEO of Search Inside yourself, a Leadership Development company incubated in Google. He speaks about how we all can develop response flexibility rather than reacting to a situation.

If you are seeing the value in the podcast, please consider Rating and Reviewing on Apple Podcasts or wherever else you consume this content. Do also contribute to Antarang Foundation, a non profit I work with closely. It helps young adults from challenging backgrounds get to the world of formal employment. This COVID-19 pandemic has been about us walking the tightrope between lives and livelihoods. India is going through its second wave or tsunami rather in terms of cases and all the attention is now being diverted to saving lives. Let us not forget the issue of livelihoods and helping these young adults with opportunities. Please visit www.playtopotential.com/payitforward for more details. Lets now get back to the conversation with Jen Goldman Wetzler.

DJ: I think picking on one of the things you said, Jen, and maybe linking it up with something that you talk about later in the book as well, you talk about using colors or drawing stars or finding other creative ways of expressing the conflict, later in the book, actually you talk about using the different senses, you use that in a different context, you talk about the Martin Luther King's speech in the way he sort of appeals to the various senses, in the way we think about the future, let me ask a broader question, what do you see the role of the various senses, both in terms of building awareness of where we are in the conflict but also in the context of coming up to a better place?

JG: Great question. And the reason why this is an essential part of the optimal outcomes methodology is because of my experience working with real people in real organizations who I saw struggling to know what they even wanted. You know, it is impossible to collaborate with other people if you do not know what you are hoping for, right. Often times when we are stuck in conflict, we are so focused on what went wrong and on who is to blame, whether it is ourselves or other people or some combination of both, that we neglect to kind of pick our heads up out of the sand and ask ourselves, hey, wait a minute, what would I like to see happen here in the future. And so this practice of imagining the future is all about asking people to stop, pause and ask themselves this really important question. But when I started to ask people to do this what I quickly realized was,

you can ask someone to imagine what they want in the future and they will give you all nice words about it but it will be meaningless if they do not put down the thinking hat and pick up the imagination hat instead. Basically if you are stuck in long-term conflict, you have probably tried many times to figure out, you know, a creative solution, right, especially because this win-win negotiation methodology has been around for four decades. So most people do know about it and have been trained in how to use it or many people particularly in the kinds of business context that I think many of your listeners are coming from, you know, they have been trained in this kind of way of thinking. And so if those kinds of thinking of creative problem-solving could have solved their dilemma, their conflict, it probably would have done so a long time ago, right and it has not worked. So I want to ask you to put down your rational thinking brain and engage your imagination instead. And the best way that I know how to engage our imagination is to make it really concrete actually by using our five senses plus our emotions to imagine what the future could be like. And if you watch Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s I Have a Dream speech, it is unbelievable. The way that he uses language to help us imagine the future that he wants for us by using the senses of sight, sound, touch, he talks about, you know, the valleys and the mountaintops, he talks about quicksand and then, hearing the ringing bells of freedom, so you can feel that quicksand that you might be sinking into but then you can hear those bells of freedom ringing. And so that imagery, that is such a great concrete example that he provides for us of what we can do for ourselves. So I encourage us all to be our own Martin Luther King Jr. and imagine what would it look like then, what would it sound like then, what would it feel like then. So for example, I have had clients say to me, you know, I can imagine going out for dinner with this person who I work with, who I have been in serious conflict with and I can smell the wine that we would be drinking and I can taste the food and I can smell it coming out of the kitchen from the restaurant that we are going to be in and I can really imagine the good feelings that I will have from connecting with this person in a different way than we have been over the last many months.

DJ: Wow, the Martin Luther King's speech, you know, one has heard about it many times but I had not quite processed it through the five senses, so it was fascinating to hear you talk about it. Moving to a different theme in the context of building awareness towards what is going on, Jen, you talk about two kinds of pauses, a reactive pause and a proactive pause. Can you talk a little bit about both of these?

JG: Well, I talk about both of these pauses because they are both important and the more you can proactively pause, the more likely you are to be successful to pause in the moments where it counts. And that is a reactive pause. An example of a reactive pause is, and this is what all clients always want to know, is like when I am stuck in the moment with somebody, how can I prevent myself from just having a knee-jerk reaction that I do not want to have, either blowing up in anger or crying or hiding and running away if I am someone whose conflict habit is shutdown, like how can I prevent myself from doing those things. And my best advice is, in those moments, you want to stop and you want to breathe and take a pause even if it is just in your own mind where you are counting to 10 inside of your own head. But my own experience and my experience helping thousands of people through this kind of process is that if we do not proactively pause in moments where we are not in the heat of the moment with someone else facing us, it is going to be a lot harder to have that pausing reflex come up in the moment. So the more we can have as a daily practice, even if it is just literally two minutes a day in the morning, you know, two minutes in the morning and two minutes in the evening or just start with one minute or start when you are, you know, walking to the refrigerator to get something to eat, you can build this into your daily life in any way that works for you, can be when you turn the shower on, you remember to take a breath or every time you buckle your seatbelt, you remember to take three breaths. For many years, I had a practice where literally every time I would unbuckle my seatbelt, that was my cue that I just needed to take three breaths

before I was allowed to get out of the car. And it really was super helpful to me. I should probably go back to doing it, you know, exactly what stopped it, maybe it was the pandemic where now I do not get in the car every day. So any practice like that where you have a regular proactive practice of pausing will help you when you are then in the moment to remember. Okay, breathe, I can breathe because it is putting that pause that allows you to then respond differently and free yourself from getting stuck on that conflict loop the way you always have.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak here again. If this topic is of interest, I would urge you to listen to my conversation with Rich Fernandez (RF) of Search Inside Yourself, a Leadership Development organization incubated in Google. Especially, the segment where he speaks about response flexibility and the notion of meta distress. When I pressed him on how we should all develop response flexibility, he referred to the notion of an integrated practice.

RF: *"What I would say is ritualize it and routinize it so make it a ritual or routine so personally for me it's the first thing I do when I wake up, I literally get up from my bed, splash water on my face and I go down stair to my office and then I sit in the morning. This is early morning before the sun is up, I mean early riser and before my family is awake, before I check my email or open up the laptop or look at my phone or anything it's the first thing I do and then second thing I do is I brush my teeth. So, to that level of routinization, it's to that level of ritualization for me. It's just the hygiene factor I call it. So, to the extent you can make the formal practice of meditation hygiene factor it will help make it a habit in your life. The other suggestion I have is something we offer in a curriculum which is make it a set of integrated practices. When people think about meditation, they think about having to do exactly what I have just said which is sati side you know x block of time and you know sit in a certain way and close your eyes and protect the space for formal practice. But there is also a way to practice mindfulness and meditation in an integrated way. For example, as you move through the course of your day, integrate it into your day between meetings if you need to walk to the rest room make that a walking meditation. I am actually serious about that. Become aware of your bodies it moves for space between your office and the rest room. Become aware of your foot fall, become aware of the felt sense of your body. How are you feeling actually in that moment?"*

DJ: Back to what Jen says, I guess it is critical for us to respond and not react when we are in the heat of the conflict and some of these proactive mindfulness practices can help. I guess, It's a bit like net practice in cricket before the real game. Lets get back to Jen now.

DJ: *Moving on, one of the other pieces I found interesting was you talking about locating others' emotional expression where it belongs which is with them, what is the nuance here, Jen?*

JG: This advice comes out of the experience of watching people get stuck on that conflict loop because they got drawn into something that could have just stayed with the other person but once we get drawn into it, now it is our problem too. The advice also comes from so many years of emotional intelligence literature and practice and advice, telling us about empathy and how to be empathetic and I think for sure there are still many many people for whom that advice is super important and people who need to learn how to listen more effectively, how to show empathy for other people. And there, I think, is an ever-growing very significant portion of the population in organizational life of people who are really great at empathizing with other people. Sometimes, over empathizing, just empathizing too much or so much that it gets in our way. And so the advice to allow other people's responses and reactions to remain with them is particularly relevant for those

of us who might be likely to be very good at empathizing with other people. And to remember that it is okay and in fact advisable to hold a boundary between ourselves and other people so that if someone else is yelling at me, I have a choice about whether I take that personally and sell myself the story that that is because I am a bad person or I did something wrong or I made a mistake or not, or maybe it is some combination, right. But at the very least, it is not only about me if someone else is yelling at me, right. It also tells me, it is also data tells me something about how they deal with something that they did not like, right. So one of the stories in the book that runs throughout the book is about Bob and Sally, and Bob has this temper where he does not like something and he flies off the handle and Sally, you know, does the same thing right back, there is this blame blame conflict loop. And so my work with them, part of it, was about helping Bob learn how to pause before he would pick up the phone and scream at someone who, you know, was responsible for that day's client mishap. And part of that was also for Sally helping her to not respond every time he would start screaming. And for her to take her own pause and break and just say, look he can scream his head off but he is going to look like the fool if I just stand here and witness it versus the minute Sally I, Sally, start yelling back, well, now I am implicated, right. You can see this with anyone who has more than one young child, any parent. I can tell you how many times I have said to my daughter, the minute you started yelling back at him or the minute you hit him, now I am not yelling at him, I am yelling at you. Look, now it is your fault too. Like if you have just come to me and said, mommy, my brother hit me, you know, whatever he did to you, you would have been in the clear but now that you are implicated too, now you are both in trouble.

DJ: That is not a conflict loop, that is like a conflict nuclear explosion.

JG: Exactly and very common, more common with adults than we might like to admit but it is the same exact pattern.

DJ: I have an 11 year old and a 7 year old, so that touched a nerve.

JG: Right, exactly. Well, you can help them. Let it stay with the other person.

DJ: Got it. Got it. And maybe just staying with it for a minute, in a way this piece sounds a bit like the point you made around relentlessly collaborate where something that is a virtue which is empathy can actually come in the way if we over empathize, so, you know, there is a downside to too much of a good thing is the way I took it.

JG: Yes, absolutely. Again I think because the world of collaboration has been around for so long, for so many decades now, there is more and more a risk that the things that we have learned how to do in order to do well when we deal with conflict are the things that are now 40 years later getting in people's way. And that is an important thing to be aware of. And to know yourself, you know, if you know that your conflict habit is that you typically blame other people, that is one thing. But you could just as easily be someone who is relentlessly collaborating with other people and that can just as easily get in your way. So know yourself, that is the first practice here, is to know your conflict habit, identify the patterns that you typically get stuck in with other people and then ask yourself, what is really going on here and what could I do that would be different from what I have done before. And there you do not need anyone, I mean the beauty of this methodology too is that you do not need anyone else's cooperation in order to free yourself from a conflict loop. It all comes from within yourself. So, if someone else is going to scream their head off and you kind of disengage from that, well then, like I said before, they are just kind of screaming and you are not involved, it is a much different, there is no loop there, you are free from it.

DJ: And just sticking with this, Jen, in your work, do you see any fundamental differences in the approach that we might need to take in the context of conflict at home, whether it is spouse or parents or children or other relatives, close relatives as compared to the way conflict shows up at work or are these the same set of universal principles that apply in both these kinds of situations?

JG: The latter. Yeah, this methodology applies across all different kinds of situations just as it has for any methodology that helps people deal with conflict, this tends to be true. And I think that is part of the power of it, is that very often, I will be working with people in an organizational context because that is my home, that is what I do, I am an organizational psychologist and then they will come back to me and say, you know, this was really helpful with the person who I am interacting with at work and I also applied it with my uncle and it was super helpful there too. So thank you for that and certainly, you know, one way that I know that this has applicability across all of these different parts of life is that I developed this methodology while teaching it as a course to students from all different walks of life, some who were mid-career professionals, others who were 22 year old's, just starting graduate school and mostly had family situations to apply it to and the course was all built around taking the framework and applying it as part of the course in people's lives. And so I saw it applied to situations that were governmentally related and in corporate environments and in home environments as people were dealing with parents, as people were dealing with children, as, you know, step parents like every possible scenario really where you could think of and that I think is part of the beauty of it.

DJ: Jen, in another section of the book, you talk about the role of values in the context of conflict. What I found interesting was you talk about ideal values and shadow values and I found that distinction quite interesting. Could you talk a little bit about what these are and the role they play in conflict situations?

JG: Ideal values are the things that we typically think of when we think of values. These are things that we really care about in life and that we are proud to say that we care about. So things like love, adventure spirituality. leadership, these are things that I personally value and that I am proud to tell you that I value. In contrast, shadow values are things that we really care about in life that we are not proud to say that we care about. And if anyone suggested to us that we cared about them, we would deny it. These are typically things like status, power, control, autonomy, financial security. The interesting thing to me about shadow values and ideal values for that matter, these can vary widely from person to person. So I have seen people who have put love on their list of ideal values and then other people in the same group of people who put love as a shadow value. So typically the way that we develop our shadow values is that it is something that we have cared about probably for most of our lives but we have been told, somewhere along the way in our lives, we got the message, this is not something that is an appropriate thing for us to value. Just take love as an example, some people, we grow up in an environment where love is not something that is shown openly, not spoken about, there is not a lot of, you know, physical expression of love and so that can show up as, you know, I really do want to express my love for other people but this is not something that has been acceptable in my world. And so the way that shadow values can get us into trouble is that we care about something but it is unspeakable, it is taboo. Like, for example, I might care about being recognized for a job well done but have no language to use to tell you, my manager, that I care about being recognized for a job well done. And so I will do all kinds of things to try to be recognized for it. I will go out of my way to do an extra extra extra great job and then what might happen is that I will inspire jealousy on behalf of my colleagues who are wondering why is she, you know, brown-nosing the boss and like that. And so these things can cause all kinds of unintended consequences for us because we just do not have the language to use to say this is something that I care about. And so what can be really helpful is for us to acknowledge for ourselves what our shadow values are and often to find some language to describe them if that is possible. This can also be helpful to do

with regard to other people. So sometimes, someone's behavior can be so grating, right, it can be so frustrating, we do not understand why are they doing this thing, that is so frustrating to me and then if we ask ourselves what might be a shadow value that might be driving this person's behavior that could explain it in some way, we do not have to come right out and ask them, you know, do you really care about being recognized and is that why you seem to be, you know, sucking up to the boss, we do not have to say that but when we are doing our analysis of the situation, we can think to ourselves, you know, maybe this person really cares about being recognized and she does not have the language to describe it. But I suspect that might be what is going on here and so again, just like we were talking about one of the insights that can come out of the mapping exercise, the mapping practice out of the shadow values exploration, we may be able to drop some empathy for other people in a way that we were not able to have before and it may not take away the pain that we experience from having to deal with what they are doing but it can give us the language to say, okay, I understand where it might be coming from and that can create an opening in a relationship with another person that was not possible before.

DJ: Got it. And in the context of values, you also talk about, you know, the AND versus the OR to use Jim Collins's words, you know, Tyranny of the OR versus Magic of the AND, can you talk a little bit about that and why that might come in the way of conflict resolution?

JG: Yes, so I can be proud to tell you what my ideal values are that I care about leadership and I care about spirituality and then I might want to hide away the fact that I care about recognition and status and power and control. The truth is all of those might be things that are important to me at the same time and just because I care about love and adventure does not mean that status and power are not also important to me and vice versa, that just because control or power or status are important to me does not mean that leadership or love are not important to me. And so being able to acknowledge that all of these are sitting side-by-side within me and that they probably have been for a very long time even though I did not have the language in the past to describe that, there is something that I think can be very freeing for people about recognizing that. And that none of us are all shadow and or all ideal or one or the other, you know, we typically have these sitting side-by-side and to acknowledge that can be very free.

DJ: And can you bring that to life with an example maybe just to make it relatable to the listeners?

JG: Yeah. So I am thinking about a family situation that a student of mine once brought. And it was a conflict that she was experiencing that involved her husband and also her husband's mother, so her mother-in-law. And she had experienced her mother-in-law as classic situation as really meddling in their lives and she could not stand how the mother-in-law was just always telling her and her husband what to do, how to raise their children, how to make their home, what kind of food to serve, you know, just went on and on. And so she went through this process, this practice of identifying her own ideal and shadow values and her mother-in-law's, tried to take her best guess what might be her mother-in-law's ideal and shadow values. And, of course you are always just taking your best guess unless you have a close enough, trusting enough relationship with someone else that you could have this conversation where you might even ask them, you know, what do you think some of your values might be and you could walk them through this process, I think that is very very rare though. Even in a situation where you have a close relationship, these can be very tough things to talk about, so you are usually taking your best educated guess. And what this student identified about her mother-in-law is that her mother-in-law both probably had an ideal value of love. She loved her son, she loved her daughter-in-law and she also had a shadow value of control and a recognition. She wanted to be recognized as someone who had advice to share and she wanted to control some aspects of, you know, how they were raising their children and what they served for dinner. And so all of that could be true for her mother-in-law I think was a very powerful

notion that the mother-in-law could both be loving and also need recognition and also have some sense of wanting to control things. The control part I think was not as easy to take action about for my student but what my student was able to do once she recognized that the mother-in-law could not come out and say I want to be recognized as someone who has advice to share. But my student was able to go to her mother-in-law and say, you know, I want to acknowledge, like I want you to know we really respect how much experience you have had over your lifetime and it means a lot to us that, you know, you would let us know your recipes from your grandmother or whatever. So it helped raise my student's empathy for her mother-in-law and also enabled her to say things and treat her mother-in-law in a way that would engage their relationship in a more positive way.

DJ: Sort of proactively address some of the of, not the emotions but some of the needs that the person might have that the person may not articulate.

JG: Exactly, even when they are unspoken which they so often are. In these intransigent conflict situations, there is usually shadow values at play that may need to remain unspoken because just to call them out and to name them could be so incredibly painful. And in fact, they have been pushed so far down in people's unconscious that...you know, even if my student would have wanted to say to the mother-in-law I think you really want to be recognized, the mother-in-law genuinely could have responded, no, I do not because she genuinely was not aware that she wanted to be recognized for her expertise and advice. So having that kind of conversations like not going to really get you anywhere. You are just going to be meeting someone's defensiveness because it is all unconsciously held. So really being able to work with that unconscious part of them in a deft skillful way can be really transformative.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here once again. It is interesting to hear Jen say that shadow values might be things that you might aware of but not acknowledge publicly. But I feel, these could also be things that are in your blind spot. Others might see it but you may not. In my work with leaders, one of the pieces they often find valuable is the initial assessment piece where I try and uncover not just their strengths and development areas but some of these deeper elements like their values, principles, what drives them and so on. Unfortunately, we never get structured data based feedback on these areas and we often don't unearth these.

I tell leaders especially in transition to pause and throw light on some of these elements that are in the shadow. The only way to do that often is for me to do a series of deep dive conversations with the people around the leader in the professional and the personal domain and across time, without restricting it to the here and now. My question to leaders often is "how 360 is your 360"?

One of my earlier guests Tasha Eurich (TE), somebody who has researched Self-Awareness for several years, speaks about it here.

TE: *"Several awareness is made up of two type of self- knowledge. The first is something we named internal self-awareness which essentially knows who we are on the inside. What do we value? What are we passionate about? What are our aspirations? What are the pattern of behaviour that we exhibit across situation but equally important is something called external self-awareness and in a nutshell what that means is knowing how other people see us and what was fascinating at least to me in our research was that we found that those two types of self-knowledge which are required for us to really be self-aware but they are not related to each other which I was kind of surprised by I was thought you know if somebody kind of knows you they are from the inside of course they would do*

the work and find out how they were seen on the outside and vice versa. But we discover that they are you sort have to think about the... independent skill set within the self-awareness area."

DJ: If this is of interest, you might like my conversation with Tasha Eurich and the Curated Playlist on Self-awareness which has perspectives from people across different walks of life. Let us get back to the conversation with Jen Wetzler.

DJ: Another piece you talk about in the book is a notion of metaphorical scaffolding, you say, that can help us repair relationships, I found that quite interesting as well. Could you expand on the notion of this metaphorical scaffolding?

JG: The scaffolding that I am talking about is very simple things like where and when you are going to have a tough conversation with someone and choosing that or allowing them to choose that, right. Saying to someone we need to talk about X but I am totally open to when we do this when works for you. Or thinking about it is changing the channels, like if you are normally having tense conversations with your team around a board table or on a Zoom call, to think about how can we switch things up so that we are not having things in the same setting. So in a physical environment if you are always sitting around, you know, the conference table, well, what could it look like, I mean, there is a reason why people have offsites, right because changing the location can relax people. It really can shift things up and make it easier to have a different kind of conversation in different environment. So asking someone to go take a walk or meeting people in a cafe as opposed to a formal conference room, even those small moves can make a big difference. As far as Zoom, sometimes just changing the configuration of people. So sometimes my experience is that my clients will expect to have a useful conversation with all 15 people that are part of a team at the same time. And all I will do is suggest that they have various sets of smaller conversations first before they all get together in that room with 15 people whether that is a Zoom room or a physical room and man, I mean that makes a huge difference. So that is what I am talking about the scaffolding that these are things that may seem simple but actually, they are much more important than we like to give them credit for and it can be helpful to pay attention to them.

DJ: One of the things I find interesting in this podcast is that I come across terms that we use so commonly in our daily life and you meet an expert and they throw a totally different perspective. I was speaking to Matt Walker, a gentleman who has researched Sleep for a few decades and he spent five minutes talking about why sleeping over something has, you know, a scientific, there is a scientific reason behind why if you sleep over something, you will end up in a better place. So when you mentioned go take a walk, that phrase is going to mean something very different from tomorrow for me. Just changing the setting I guess makes such a difference to get into to a better outcome.

JG: Yes, it definitely does. Take a walk, ask someone to go take a walk rather than sitting and talking to each other, the movement, there is something about movement, especially if you are someone who you know about yourself that you are kinesthetic person. And also, you can ask yourself who are the other people involved here and who will I be talking to and are they someone who might appreciate nature or the outdoors or getting a breath of fresh air, the movement as well, that is a great question to ask.

DJ: The other thing that I found interesting was you talk about small experiments and you suggest a prototyping approach to getting out of conflict. Rather than shooting for the ideal outcome, you sort of say that let us take baby steps towards it. Could you talk a little bit about what you mean by that and how that plays out in a conflict context?

JG: Yes. I talk about mini experiments. So if you have been doing your conflict habit and that is not working for you, you know what you do not want to do but you do not really know what you do want to do. So my best advice is to start small, start in a safe environment actually, so if you are in a really tough situation with somebody from work, try testing out a new behavior with someone from home where the stakes are going to be lower. So, you know, if your conflict habit is relentlessly collaborate and you have decided that doing something different might look like being direct and instead of asking someone else what it is that they want and then trying to figure out options that could meet their interests and yours, you are just going to tell the other person, you know, you want to test out telling someone what it is that you need and just being more direct. So you could try that out with your partner at home or with a kid at home. And just be more direct in a situation and see what happens, what is the feedback. I ask people to take notes in a very simple way. So you do a behavior. So in this case, you know, say something directly, here is what I need in this situation. And then see what happens and write down for yourself what worked well about what I did and what would I do differently next time. And I always encourage people to put at least three bullets under each side, each question. You know, on the left hand side of the page, what worked well, three bullets, right hand side, what would I do differently, three bullets. And it is all framed in the positive, right. I did not say what do I criticize about myself. I said what would I do differently next time so that you are constantly feeding back some really helpful information to yourself about what you would do differently next time and then you take it into the more tricky environment at work and do your experiments there, right. See how it goes. And you know keep testing in small ways until you find what works.

DJ: And you talk about this notion of a pattern breaking paths and I really really loved the example that you gave of President Carter at Camp David. You talk about the incident of President Carter offering free photographs addressed to Begin's children and you talk about how that provides a breakthrough to a sort of deadlock till then. Can you sort of share this example and talk about the broader insight here?

JG: Yes, there are two different things that you just mentioned, one is the pattern breaking path and then, one is the example of Carter which I think makes us related and slightly different points. I am going to take them separately. The pattern breaking path, there are three focus points to it. One is when you think about what is a pattern breaking path. First of all, it is made up of a set of actions. So when you are finding your way out of the conflict loop, it is not just going to be one action that is going to set you free because you have been going around on that loop presumably for a while. It is more likely going to be a set of actions that is going to help you out of that loop towards an optimal outcomes loop that will then become its own self-reinforcing pattern. So you are looking at a set of actions that one builds on the next, builds on the next, builds on the next. Number two, you want to keep your actions simple because typically when you are stuck in a conflict loop, the situation is already pretty complex like we were talking about before, so you do not want to add more complexity on top of it. So you want to keep your actions simple so that you can track your impact over time and so that it is more likely that your action will have the intention, it will have the intended effect. And three, you want to make your actions surprisingly different than you have had before. This surprising nature, right, so if you have been relentlessly collaborating with people and it is not working, you being direct and saying here is what I need from you, that will surprise people and it will jolt them potentially out of the conflict loop as well or at least there is a higher likelihood of jolting them out of the conflict loop as well in a good way. It will help them respond differently than they have been responding in the past. So then you are both freed from that conflict loop. So that is what it means to create a pattern breaking path. Now this example of Jimmy Carter absolutely has some aspects of what I just described on it, particularly the surprising nature of it. So the story is that Jimmy Carter in 1978 brought to Camp David the prime minister of Israel at the time

who was Menachem Begin and the president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat. He brought them because he wanted to help them make peace between Israel and Egypt. And after many days, the negotiations had broken down, neither side was willing to budge and each leader, Begin and Sadat was packing up his bags to go home. And so Carter went and asked his assistant to find three pictures of the three of them, of Carter, Begin and Sadat that had been taken earlier in the week, and Carter signed each picture and addressed each picture to the grandchildren of Begin who Begin had told Carter about earlier in the week. And so Carter goes and knocks on Begin's door as he is packing to go home and hands these pictures to Begin. And as Begin looks at one postcard and then the next and the next, he begins to cry. And within the next day, Begin had stopped packing and went back to the negotiation table and made a historic peace agreement that is in effect to this day. And what I love about this story is first of all the surprising nature of what Jimmy Carter did but the real point to me of this story is about the power of helping people see the unintended consequences of their actions on people who may not be immediately obviously involved in the situation. So what Jimmy Carter did there was that, like we were talking about about mapping, he widened the situation for Begin. So Begin was so focused on not having gotten what he wanted from Sadat in the prior negotiations that week. But when Carter helped Begin imagine his grandchildren and the lives of war that they would continue to have to experience, future generations would continue to experience because of Begin's failure to come to an agreement with Egypt with Sadat, that is what really got to Begin emotionally and enabled him to go back to the negotiating table and make an agreement. So the power of asking ourselves what might be the unintended consequences of my actions here, either my actions or of my inactions and then allowing that to help us see do I want to do something different here, to me that that is very powerful.

DJ: Fascinating, Jen, this podcast is titled Play to Potential. As we wrap up, given all the work you do and your, you know, research around conflict and everything else, net net, how do you think about the phrase Play to Potential?

JG: I think about it as we should all be playing to our highest potential, looking at what are the ways that we can live at our highest potential and as that relates to the work that we have been talking about together over the last while, I would say your ability to free yourself from conflict even without anyone else's cooperation will help you live at your highest potential, will help you play to your highest potential.

DJ: Jen, thank you so much for your time and your insights, really really insightful talking to you.

JG: Thank you so much Deepak. I love your questions and just great to be in conversation with you and in your presence, thanks so much.

DJ: Thank you.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. I hope you found the conversation purposeful. A couple of messages before we wrap up. If you find the podcast purposeful, do take a moment and contribute to Antarang Foundation. I work closely with them and can vouch for their impact with young adults who come from challenging backgrounds. As a matter of fact two of the editor of the podcast Akash Deore given Arman Bansod come through Antarang Foundation. While we are battling the health crisis, we cannot afford to ignore the issue of solving for livelihoods in our battle to save lives. You can get more details at the Pay It forward section at playtopotential.com.

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To know more about what is in the podcast archives and the advisory work I do, you could just visit www.playtopotential.com. Thank you and hope to have you tune into one of the subsequent conversations at the podcast. Bye now.

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Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Nuggets

- 73.00 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - The Full Conversation
- 73.01 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Understanding the 4 default conflict habits
- 73.02 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Why some conflict patterns are common
- 73.03 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Listening to understand the nuances
- 73.04 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Engaging our senses
- 73.05 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Reactive and a Proactive pause
- 73.06 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Downsides of too much empathy and collaboration
- 73.07 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Role of ideal and shadow values in conflict
- 73.08 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Real meaning of "take a walk"
- 73.09 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Pattern breaking behaviour and Camp David

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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