

Peaceful Life Radio

Show Transcript

Harmonizing Polarities - A Conversation with Dr. Christy Vincent

Hello, everyone, and welcome to Peaceful Life Radio, where we explore practices and perspectives that help you live a more peaceful and fulfilling life. Today, we're thrilled to be joined by Dr. Christy Vincent, a renowned college professor, business consultant, and life coach. Dr. Vincent is here to discuss the powerful concept of navigating polarities and how it can unlock new possibilities for personal growth and inner peace.

Dr. Vincent's expertise in this area promises to be really helpful to us all.

But before we dive right in, let's remind our listeners to like, download, and subscribe to our podcast. It only takes a few seconds, and it really helps us. Hello, Christy, and welcome to Peaceful Life Radio.

Hi, Don. Thank you. I'm thrilled to be here.

Well, we're glad you're here, Christy. We really want to know about this concept of polarity and how it helps us live a more peaceful life. So, what are you talking about when you say polarities?

Thanks, David. Yes, this concept is very alive in me right now with my work and also with my family and relationships.

A polarity is an interdependent yet seemingly opposite state of being, way of being, characteristic. that must coexist over time for success. So let me say that a different way. There are holes that exist in the world, and they are both necessary. Let's look at a few of them. How about work and rest, reality and hope, saving, spending, developing bonds, Maintaining distance?

Individual. Collective.

So, you're saying there are these things that seem like they're opposite, but we have to have them.

And we have to have both of them. That's what the interdependence means. In other words, we can't really have one without

the other. Exactly. I mean, it's good to save all of your money and to be good about saving your money, but if you don't use it when you need to use it, like your kid's getting married or you have a bill that you need to pay, then we're in trouble.

Right. And the point is that life is complex and it's becoming more complex all the time related to lots of things, including technology. And it asks us to respond with both and on these polarities. An example would be breathing in and breathing out. Inhaling and exhaling. We understand that just naturally.

We know that we can't just inhale. We must exhale. It'd be a funny thing for us to say: are we going to inhale or exhale this afternoon?

So, both of these polarities are necessary. They're essential.

Essential. Now here's how it relates in ways to peace. both inner peace as well as peace in your relationships or your organizations.

They are both necessary, but our personalities, the way we were raised, socialized, and rewarded for things, tend to prefer one of the poles. When we do so, we sometimes ignore the other pole or even demonize it. It's an interesting thing that happens inside of us, and we don't see the benefits of both. We either pick one or the other as our preference.

Yeah, and part of it is the way our brains work. We tend to think of things in either or. Now, either or is not a problem because sometimes you have to pick. Are you going to wear the blue shirt today or the white shirt today, right? You're not going to wear both shirts.

So, this concept does not imply that either or will never work or is never a good solution. What it's implying is that there are many times when, if we pick one or the other of these, we are going to suffer.

In conflict situations, it seems that one person has a preference for one more than another, and then they become sort of judgmental, right?

Very much so.

We are likely to not only get the benefits of the one that we prefer, but the either or, but we're likely also to get the overuses of it, and we are not getting the benefits of the other. And what we're trying to do is get the benefits of both without the overuses of either.

Here's a small story from my childhood, but just as you were telling this, I remembered it.

My dad would be very critical. We had to pinch pennies a bit growing up. We rarely go out to eat, but when we did, Dad would say, now you have to drink water, don't order any soft

drinks or extra things that cost extra, and besides, it's not worth it anyway, he would say. Just order water because that was free, right?

And that was okay, I understood that, but then he could be really judgy towards other people buying the Coke. Well, that person just spent 3 on that Coke.

Right, and in fact, that's a great segue into a little mental exercise I want us to do to really understand this concept.

Let's do it.

Let's imagine you have a piece of paper and you have created four squares by putting one line vertical and one line horizontal.

Okay.

I've done it.

All right. And so, we're going first to treat that as two columns. And let's take one of these polarities. How about focusing on self and focusing on others? Both are necessary. So, let's say on the left-hand side of the paper, we have to focus on self. And at the top, in the top left-hand corner, we're going to write down or think about the benefits of focusing on the self.

What happens if a person is able to show up in the world and focus on themselves?

Okay, I'll take a stab at this. As a professor, I often need to feed myself. I need to take time to learn more and explore ideas in order to be more effective in the classroom. So, paying attention to my personal development becomes important.

Another thing I mention is taking time out for physical fitness to help my body be stronger. And there's self-efficacy. We want to be better at what we do and spend some time improving our skills, knowing more, and trying new things. And it extends us a bit, doesn't it? So, we can take what we know and use it in new and different ways.

Yeah, exactly. All good answers and they all point to the fact that we are required. by life to spend some time focusing on ourselves. Now let's crawl over to the right-hand side of the page, still at the top, and let's have that column be focusing on others. Let's talk about some benefits we can realize if we show up in life focusing on others.

Well, I think it was John Dunn who wrote, No man is an island. Each one of us cannot really live independently of the others around us. So, it's actually a real benefit to having great relationships. It helps us build empathy when we learn to put ourselves in other's shoes and to see things. It's helpful for perspective-taking taking, maybe.

Yeah, that's, that's great, Devin.

Both of those are wonderful. And we are able to serve others. Thanks. And society is better off if we are helping and serving each other, focusing on the other person. And so, this is just a brief exercise where we've easily seen the benefits of both, and if we sat here longer, we could generate many benefits of both.

Now we're going to think about what we're going to call overuses. The overuses of focusing on self. Meaning, what happens if we do this too much? If we take it too far, even to the exclusion of focusing on others?

Well, we lose sight of ourselves as a part of a larger whole, and we're often blinded to the needs of others that we love.

We have this, it's all about me. That selfishness that we can develop so easily.

Y'all probably heard of that phrase, Navel gazing, right. where we are so focused on ourselves we may even forget others are around. Really could actually harm our relationships. We could be seen as someone who does not have any Empathy, or the ability to take perspectives of others or focus on others.

So that was easy as well.

Is there a trick question coming up? I'm braced for it. These were easy. Let's

briefly talk about some of the overuses of focusing on others.

Sometimes, we're in relationships that fail. And when we involve ourselves with others, there's always a chance that the self is exposed.

And of course, it's always disappointing when that happens. And one of the things we might do focused on others all the time is we may not care for ourselves. For instance, I know when I get really busy with my work, I don't take enough time for my own physical care. I've mentioned before in previous podcasts that I like to walk, and I like to hike.

And I find sometimes when I get really busy, I start sacrificing. A couple of things come to me, Christy, when I think about overuses with others. One would be, we can become a doormat. Just whatever you want. I'll give up everything because I've got to let you do it. And we find ourselves giving, but never having the necessary amount of receiving as well to have balance.

Sometimes, it's easy to lose ourselves and let the other person run the show instead of being a co-equal.

Right. And so, if we think about our inner peace for a minute. then we realize that if we are not able to both and this particular polarity, and this is one of dozens and dozens of polarities, then we have a chance of suffering internally, because we are likely to not only get the benefits of the one that we prefer, the either or, but we're likely also to get the overuses of it, and we are not getting the benefits of the other.

And a situation comes up that requires it. And so, we suffer because we don't understand the benefits of the other and we don't stretch ourselves to think about what life would look like if I showed up both focusing on myself and focusing on others. What do we do about this Christy? I think we try to make what may be invisible to us more visible by mapping out these polarities like we have just done.

In doing so, we did it. imaginary, but you can do it with a piece of paper. Almost any polarity that you have, you can put one on one side and one on the other, and you can do that mental exercise of the benefit of both. And what we're trying to do is get the benefits of both without the overuses of either.

Here's one, for instance, at work, and let's see how you might map this out for us. Many jobs want us to contribute, and they may use terms like, I want you to give above and beyond, go the extra mile, give 110%. And all of us want to be good workers and give full measure for the work required and expected of us.

But then there's another part of us that says, I want you to I need a little balance here. I don't want to be on call 24 7. I shouldn't have to answer questions after five or when my workday is over. I shouldn't have to answer that email and turn it in because somebody sent it at eight o'clock in the evening.

Yeah, that's so wonderful. And I run into it all of the time with my executive and professional coaching. A person who is trying to get the benefits of both being involved and engaged at work. And being able to leave that and be engaged in their home life or focused on themselves has to realize the benefits of doing both of those things rather than either or.

But when I talk to people, they tend to think that is their only choice. I'm either engaged, and I have this electronic leash, and people can get to me all the time, and that's what's required, or I pretty much focus on myself. I'll give a little bit at work, but really, what I want to do is use this job as a way of furthering my own self-interest.

So, I look at it that way: get the paycheck, engage, not so much. I'm going to focus on myself. I spend time trying to help people see how they could potentially get the benefits of both of those. One of the things that it requires is not just a mindset but a heart set and a skill set. We have to ask ourselves, when I walk into work every day, what would it look like?

What would it feel like? What would I be experiencing if I were balancing both my focus on myself and taking care of myself and engaging and focusing on the organization and what it needs? This is a real problem for a lot of folks. We talk about work-life balance a great deal. And yet, in America, and I don't have the facts in front of me on this, but I believe that the average person has about seven days of vacation per year, but we actually only take somewhere around three or four of those because we're afraid to send a signal to our boss that we are not totally committed.

I've heard that too. And wow, yeah, I want to understand this dynamic more, but there might be a question in some people's minds. So, I'm going to say the one that came to my mind, but what do I do? If I had this hell bent for leather boss who reaches out to me, if it's eight o'clock, two in the morning, and I'm trying to honor the, uh, emergencies that take place and be that person that can say, Hey, I realized that sometimes this needs to take place and I need to do it.

But I can't do it all the time. What do I do in those situations where I feel like I could be in jeopardy if I don't do that, or if I don't show up at this fundraising event that I don't feel anything for, and it just tires me out. Help me work through that.

Yeah. Wonderful question. And being more open and communicative is helpful.

Secondly, the boss and others under that boss are suffering. And even though that boss may not recognize it, they are experiencing the overuses of the engagement, the demand of the job themselves. So, engaging in a conversation where you are able to say how can I both serve you and what this company needs and have time for my family and have time for my own refueling in the evening.

Let's talk about ways that we could have both of those things happen. Just posing that question to anyone helps them think about how they may have taken an either-or idea there. They may have said you're either committed or you're not. Where you're saying, No, I'm trying to both be committed to this work and do and be what you need for me to be, and I'm recognizing the value in refueling myself and having some time where I can then show back up the next day, ready to do that again.

So, make it a conversation. What can be done rather than assuming it's always going to be either or, and rather than assuming that it's not possible?

What you may be uncovering here is a thought pattern, another either or type of thinking that says, if my boss requires it of me, well, I can't talk to my boss because they're the boss.

And honestly, no conflicts or drama gets solved when people say, hands off, you can't talk about it. Right. We need to be able to speak about it and try to resolve it. We're not going to get anywhere if we don't have those conversations.

Oh, absolutely. And I want to return to what we said a minute ago when you were talking about your dad being judgy about people who are different.

We've talked about how this is important to recognize these polarities and trying to get the benefits of both. I want now to talk about something else that happens. I was socialized growing up. to focus on others. That was what I was rewarded for, and that was what made me feel good, and I often didn't see the benefits of focusing on self, because I was so rewarded for focusing on others.

The problem is that becomes who I am, and who I am then is also who I am not, and so if we take this pole of focusing on self and focusing on others, when I think of focusing on self, I don't tend to look at it from the benefits. I tend to look from the overuses.

If I understand you, what that means is, if we get our self-worth from being focused on others, then anything we do for ourselves, we interpret as being selfish.

That's not necessarily the only way to think of that, but.

Absolutely, because we can see those, we don't tend to look at the benefits, we tend to look at the overuses. And then we. become invested in being right, and we become invested in judging the other person, because we are really not wanting to be that, and we want to be focused on others, we want to be rewarded for that, and we don't want to be seen as a navel gazer, as somebody who's selfish, and you can see how it's a mistake in our thinking, because we can see and realize that the person that's different than we are.

Maybe receiving the benefits of focusing on self. Maybe we can stretch and learn something. Maybe it's a growth area for us and we may be blind to our own overuses of whichever pole we want or whichever pole we desire. Let's go back to our boss situation. If the boss is a person more focused on tasks than relationships, they're more focused on action than reflection then we start only seeing them as one of those, and we don't look for times when they are in fact focused on both the task and the relationship. If we're a person who's a relationship person, we only see them for the negative parts or the overuses. of focusing on tasks. Then we separate ourselves and we're like, I don't want to be like them.

And now we don't have peace. We're dividing ourselves. We're dividing ourselves from the people in our families and the people in our organizations. So, a real healthy appreciation of the need for the polarities, the need for navigating those and balancing them, can bring us from being divided to being more unified as a society, as people. Another example I'd like to bring up is thinking about parenting. We were all parented and many of us are parents and we realize that children need both support and they need to be challenged. They need support, they need love, they need to feel part of a group that loves them unconditionally.

They need help when they're learning to tie their shoes or ride a bicycle. Someone rides right near them, supporting them, giving them a safe place to land, a home to come to. They also need challenge. They need to move away from home, go out, have some confidence in the world, and be able to grow, learn, and even fail.

And any of us who are parents know how difficult it is to navigate those polarities, but how absolutely essential they both are.

Christy, I believe you've hit upon maybe one of the things that divides people the most, the polarities. We see it so much every day. We face political polarities, we face religious polarities, economic polarities.

Well, and a lot of times in relationships, one of the ways we balance polarities is we marry someone or have a partner who's got the different pole. And in organizations, we do the same thing. If we're trying to do the difference between action and reflection, we'll have some people in the organization more on reflection and having learning conversations after projects are over and that type of, and we'll have some that are more action-oriented.

I've learned that it's really important for each of us to attempt to think in terms of both and So, whatever the poll is that we're talking about, if you can ask yourself, How can I get the benefits of the one I enjoy and the benefits of the other one without the overuses of either? It really is an imagination that you have to have.

You have to think in your heart, What would that be like? It's a challenge. We're not giving up the one we prefer. We're expanding ourselves to include the other.

When you mention these things, I think of what is sometimes called complementary relationships. David Lowry is a 20,000-foot guy.

He likes to look down on the big picture and ideate over, Oh, we could do this thing. I imagine what it would be like if we did this, this, and this. My wife is a getter-done person. All that. Ideating drives her nuts. It's like, come down to reality. But the way we live together is complimentary. She appreciates my ability for big pictures, and I appreciate, really appreciate, her ability to plan things and carry them out.

Precision and focus on the intricacies of things. But there have been times in my life when I couldn't have appreciated that. I, I must confess there were times in my life where I saw it as an inconvenience. Like, why can't that person be more like me? That either-or thinking really ruined a lot of good times because of that.

As we wrap up. Dr. Vincent, what final thoughts or practical advice would you share with our listeners about how they can start incorporating the principles of navigating polarities into their daily lives and on the journey toward greater peace and fulfillment?

My practical advice is to open our eyes to the necessity of both and thinking in certain contexts, particularly when dealing with dilemmas and situations that arise in life.

And if we find ourselves advocating for one of the poles and not being able to see the benefits of the other, ask ourselves, what would both-and thinking look like here? What would it be like? How could I get the benefits of both of these and not the overuses? Just that alone, that language and that questioning will open our eyes to the necessity, and it will make us more aware of times when we're othering people who are different and not appreciating how they are complementing your way of being.

I want to point out some of the leaders in this area. If your listeners want to look at Barry Johnson, Brian Emerson, and Kelly Lewis, you'll also recognize some of Parker Palmer's work here, some of Richard Rohr, and some of Rene Brown. You can find it in many places. Put navigating polarities into a YouTube search.

You can find some of those videos that explain it. Well,

Dr. Vincent, this has been a fabulous interview. How can we contact you, or how can people contact you?

I have a website. It's my name: Christy Vincent dot comm. You can send me a message, and I can respond and discuss this further.

And then I do have a lovely self-evaluation instrument. It's not very expensive that I was trained to use, and it helps people identify where they fall on some important polarities in either leadership or what we call human polarities. If anyone's interested in that, they can contact me through my website.

This has been a truly fascinating exploration of navigating polarities with Dr. Christy Vincent. We've learned how this concept can help us avoid the pitfalls of what we might call black-and-white thinking, cultivate greater self-awareness, and find harmonious ways of living and relating to others.

Christy, we're grateful for your time and insights, and we encourage our audience to continue exploring this powerful idea long after our conversation today.