

Peaceful Life Radio

Show Transcript

Stop the Spiral – Speak the Truth

David Lowry: 0:36

Hello, everyone. Welcome to Peaceful Life Radio, your place on the internet for cultivating a peaceful life. We're here to help you enjoy life more by eliminating interpersonal drama and conflict and developing some peaceful habits. I'm David Lowry and with me is Don Drew. What's our show about today, Don?

Don Drew: 0:54

Today's episode tackles a fascinating concept. It's called the Spiral of Silence. This theory explores how the fear of being alone can silence our voices, leading to misunderstandings, resentment, and ultimately conflict. We will explore the mechanics of this phenomenon, note how it fuels drama in our personal lives, and how it can impact group dynamics.

David Lowry: 1:14

Ooh sounds pretty good to me. The Spiral of Silence. So, whether you're navigating a disagreement with a friend, a heated debate at work, or simply want to improve the quality of your relationships, this is the episode for you.

Don Drew: 1:29

But before we begin, I want to ask all of you to subscribe, like, download our podcast, and tell your friends about us. David, what is the Spiral of Silence really about?

David Lowry: 1:39

It's a theory in communication that explains how people's perception of public opinion influences their willingness to speak up. And here's how it relates to interpersonal conflict and drama. When you have an opinion that you think is in the minority, and don't think your opinion is going to be accepted as the majority opinion, you stay silent. We gauge the climate around us with certain topics by observing how others are acting, and if we don't think it's going to include us, we opt out. That's what the Spiral of Silence is all about-- staying silent instead of speaking up.

Don Drew: 2:18

So, if someone feels their opinion is unpopular or unwanted, they're less likely to voice it for fear of disapproval, ridicule, or even rejection. This silence can exacerbate conflict because the opposing viewpoint goes unchallenged.

David Lowry: 2:32

I know, and there's been times in my life when I really wanted to speak up. I wanted to say what I thought, but I didn't think it would be appreciated. And we've all been there, right? We know what it's like to feel like, Oh boy. If I bring this up, am I going to be the only one in the group to feel this way? Or am I making a fool of myself? Or worse, will I receive disapproval from other people?

Don Drew: 2:58

So, the Spiral of Silence highlights the importance of speaking up, even when your viewpoint seems unpopular. It may help foster a more open and inclusive environment where diverse perspectives can be heard and considered. What other things does this silence bring?

David Lowry: 3:12

If you avoid expressing your true opinions, because you fear being ostracized, the underlying issues of a problem remain unaddressed. Silence breeds isolation. We think we can't speak up, so, we keep quiet because our worries that we'll be censured or that people won't like us or whatever reason, but it also fuels drama and conflict because when we withhold communication, we take away our ability to resolve any disagreements. And we feel isolated, we're not being honest with our feelings, and it breeds misunderstandings. That's the main thing. And, Don, it can happen in families where one person in the family feels that everybody in the family feels a certain way. It can happen in your church where you think everybody believes like this, and so I don't get to say what I think. This Spiral of Silence happens a lot in our life.

Don Drew: 4:05

There's a real danger behind this bottling up. It can lead to frustrations, unexpressed concerns, and disagreements. They build up over time, creating a wellspring of frustration. This frustration then can eventually erupt in dramatic outbursts, or passive-aggressive behavior, escalating conflict.

David Lowry: 4:20

The Spiral of Silence also feeds into this notion of the feedback loop occurring when a group of people think we hold the majority viewpoint, we're not interested in hearing what anybody else says. And so, it creates this echo chamber where we're all hearing the same thing.

Don Drew: 4:38

We sometimes suffer the illusion that by being quiet, we're actually avoiding conflict in our lives. And really unchallenged opinions can become more extreme. If one side feels

their viewpoint is dominating the conversation while the other remains silent, it can lead to a sense of righteousness on one side and resentment on the other, effectively escalating the conflict.

David Lowry: 4:59

Groupthink actively discourages any dissenting opinions. It could be like you're in work, and work has a way of doing things, and somebody comes up with a new idea, and you're told very forcefully, I don't want to hear any other ideas on how to do this. This is how we do it.

Don Drew: 5:18

Groupthink also discourages the expression of dissenting opinions. This can lead to overlooking important information or potential flaws in a group's decision, potentially leading to actions that create conflict. One of the issues with groupthink is that sometimes we value cohesiveness, being a part of the group, or being loved by the group, overrides our ability or willingness to speak up and that's a serious problem.

David Lowry: 5:43

If you tell everybody, we don't want to hear what you have to say, we've got our own ways of doing things, so just shut up. What you're doing is ignoring the red flags because you think that if you have a harmonious group where we all think alike that all the problems go away. But really what happens is problems that are there remain unseen, and they build on each other and lead to failure.

Don Drew: 6:06

In some cases, someone might feel their concerns are being ignored or in order to maintain group harmony, they're more likely to become frustrated and potentially act out in a disruptive way, further fueling the conflict.

David Lowry: 6:17

We've seen all these cases of sexual harassment in major corporations where people reported it and were squashed because the people involved were very high-profile people and they wanted to keep their ratings and things like this. But eventually, the truth will out. And when the truth out, it's even worse than if they had taken care of it as it had come along. Sometimes it's better to solve a problem early than it is to let things fester. We need to break the cycle, don't we, Don?

Don Drew: 6:45

Yes, we do. Encouraging open discussion is one of those things that you can do that's very positive. Creating a safe space for open discussion and diverse perspectives is absolutely crucial. This allows for the free flow of ideas and helps us identify potential conflicts before they escalate.

David Lowry: 7:00

We need to seek out dissent. That is hard for us to do. But one of the things that we can learn to do when we talk with other people is say that's what I think. Do you have a different viewpoint? Or, if you're in a group, does anybody else think about this in a different way? We need to be sure that all views are on the table before we move on to the next thing. In other words, make it safe for people to say, no, I was thinking about something different. Hear me out and see what you think.

Don Drew: 7:28

And this disapproval can come from many different aspects. Media can play a significant role in shaping this perception of how we feel about what we want to say or would like to say. If a particular viewpoint gets more coverage in news or social media can become misconstrued as a dominant opinion and silencing opposing voices and we may be one of those voices.

David Lowry: 7:51

I have a social feed that gives me all the news stories from organizations that I like. And you have one that gives you news stories from organizations that you'd like. And they keep telling us things that make us feel comfortable, it makes me feel comfortable, but what we may not realize is that they've learned that they can get listeners by preaching to the choir. News organizations give the news however people want to hear it. It's important that we realize this feedback loop creates this mental notion that everybody's in agreement with us, and that doesn't cause us to grow and expand. Let's say you, me, and some others have a similar opinion, but we're all staying silent. What that does is tell the rest of the group that they're more important than we are. Then they begin to talk and think that hey, we are more important than all these other people. So, they start making decisions based upon their perceived majority viewpoints. And it gets amplified, and groups become entrenched in their own beliefs. It becomes an echo chamber, where everybody thinks they know what everybody thinks, but not necessarily. Let me give you an example of that. In our home state of Oklahoma, about 70 percent of the people here are Republicans, and about 30 percent are Democratic. Now, it could be flipped in other states, as you know. But the point here is that if you happen to be a Democrat in Oklahoma, you're going to hear a lot of majority opinions. And sometimes, you're very reticent to speak up about what you think because why ruin the good time of about 70 percent of the people around you? And it can happen in reverse in other states too. We understand that sometimes a conservative viewpoint is marginalized, and people don't want to hear what you have to say. When that happens, we all lose because we benefit by hearing a lot of different viewpoints, even those that are very different from ours.

Don Drew: 9:46

In the absence of your voice, if people don't speak up, if you don't speak up, the opposing side may not understand the reasons behind your views. And this can breed resentment and make it harder to resolve conflict.

David Lowry: 9:57

And conflict and drama escalate rather quickly in those situations because we all carry this tension, and this tension builds up leading to frustration and outbursts. My wife has a saying that, it will come out sideways. In other words, you will be talking about something and instead of addressing the issue, you'll get angry about something else. We need open communication because it's the key to de-escalating conflict. In other words, If I sense that there's another viewpoint, and maybe it's one that I don't believe in personally, I need to hear it. I need to give people the opportunity to talk about it if for no other reason, it will harm our relationship in other areas. And letting people have their say isn't going to kill you or the worst thing that ever happened to you. In fact, you might learn something that would open your mind. Some people, when they hear another point of view think, I don't want to hear your point of view. I'm right. I know I'm right. Maybe it's in religion, politics, or maybe it's about what's good, bad, right, or wrong. A lot of people feel they have the higher ground, and they make it apparent that they aren't really interested in hearing what we or anybody else has to say. That's not a great way to make peace. And even though you may feel very uncomfortable hearing another person's viewpoint, it's okay for you to listen to their viewpoint. In fact, I'd encourage you to use words like tell me more about what you think. Tell me more about what you believe. Why do you think that way? When we encourage people to do that, we're beginning to relieve the tension a bit and open the door for dialogue.

Don Drew: 11:35

Open communication also fosters trust and strengthens relationship, and there's a direct relationship between trust and communication. When we trust someone, we're willing to communicate with them, and we trust them to be honest with us, and we will communicate with people whom we trust.

David Lowry: 11:50

I love that you used the word trust. You know you've made some progress in your peaceful life when people are able to tell you something they know you disagree with, but they know you'll be respectful to them, nonetheless. So, we're encouraging you to speak up. I call it the three S's suit up, show up and speak up. Sometimes we have to speak up and say what's on our mind. Now we can do it assertively but with a kindness, we don't have to be aggressive. We could say, hey, I know all of you believe what you've said, but I see it a little bit differently and I want to make sure that my viewpoint gets heard.

Don Drew: 12:26

Another thing we can do to break the cycle is to focus on common goals. Shifting the focus from our own individual opinions to shared goals can help people find common ground and work together to address issues constructively.

David Lowry: 12:37

When we don't encourage this kind of communication, it shows a lack of empathy. A lack of empathy means that it's not open communication. It means it's difficult for us to

understand where each of us are coming from, and it makes it harder to find common ground and resolve these disagreements.

Don Drew: 12:55

A lot of times when people feel their opinions aren't being heard or listened to, they retreat into various social circles where they know their views are validated, and this creates an us-them mentality, further deepening the divide and making conflict resolution more challenging.

David Lowry: 13:11

I'm glad you mentioned that us-them divide because this us-them divide is a competitive viewpoint, and we keep stressing the importance of being a collaborative person who works together instead of using the power play against other people. Us against them, or my viewpoint against your viewpoint, or winning versus losing. We're trying to open the communication. Even if it's uncomfortable, it's okay to open the door for honest conversations. And we'll talk about some ways of doing that maybe in a minute, but one of the ways you can do it for right now is to say, would you be open to hearing a different viewpoint on this subject, or I know most of you here probably believe this, but I've listened to your viewpoints, would you be interested in hearing mine? And of course, that's going to take a lot of courage on our part because we're going to have to risk being vulnerable a bit, but it's better for you to do that than to be in this well of silence that makes you feel angry, not heard, and only increases your tension in life. The whole problem with the spiral of silence is that one group of people or one set of opinions believes it has the right to be dominant and enforced over everybody else. Don and I should list a couple of topics where the spiral of silence might intrude. See if these topics have ever caused you to take pause.

Don Drew: 14:35

One of the things that's said about technology is we should slow down the pace of technological advancement to allow society to adapt. This could be unpopular with those who see technology as a force for progress.

David Lowry: 14:47

People have been saying we don't need TikTok for example but it's one of the largest social media platforms in the country. But if we say I don't want to hear your viewpoint about requiring social media companies to show responsibility then we may exacerbate a problem with our young people or with other people who these companies impact in some way.

Don Drew: 15:05

Another favorite of mine is family drama. We sometimes like to vent about our family problems and that can be cathartic, but it also drags others into the drama. Some couples and friends might choose to avoid these discussions in order to maintain boundaries.

David Lowry: 15:19

If you want to have a great relationship, you've got to make it safe to talk about these dangerous topics. Some of the topics that we get upset about in our relationships are really conversations we need to have. Maybe it's over money our sexual relationships-- could be over how we raise the kids or whether we're going to share the same religion. There are hundreds of things that go into this. But it's vital that we find a way to have these conversations without stifling dissent Then there's politics and religion. We all know about that one, don't we, Don? Those are big ones in our country today. These deeply personal topics can be very divisive. One of the things I've heard so often is if you don't like it, why are you even living here in this country anyway? Or why don't you go somewhere else? That's what we mean by groupthink, or the Spiral of Silence. Sometimes it's uncomfortable for people to hear an opposing viewpoint. They would soon get rid of people than listen to them. It's really in your best interest to encourage people to have their say and to speak up.

Don Drew: 16:19

What about work life balances? That's one of the things I've been interested in for a very long time. And here's a quote for you. A strong work ethic and long hours aren't necessarily the key to success. Prioritizing personal life can lead to greater productivity. This could be challenged by those who glorify the hustle culture.

David Lowry: 16:37

Certainly can, and I'm really glad there's a new voice speaking up. Of course, in the USA, we are a society that cherishes corporate life and profits, but we do need to hear from those people who say, wait just a minute. Profits are great, but we also need to take care of workers. I mean, you also need to have a safe workplace. And we need to have work life balance, and we need other benefits as well. Here's one and that's Talking about your exes in your past relationships. Sometimes those can stir up jealousy and insecurity, but just because you leave one relationship and find another one doesn't mean that all the problems have gone away. Sometimes you still have to get together for family gatherings and marriages and graduation exercises and things like that. And we've got to learn how to work through all of those without being so arrogant. Absolutely opposed to other people, places, and things. Don, on a personal level, when you find that you aren't going to agree with your partner on something. You're both fundamentally opposed to each other on certain ideas, what do you do?

Don Drew: 17:41

I'll tell you what my wife says. (laughter) What I should do is. She always says, ask-- ask more questions-- which is really great advice. A lot of things we think, we do with limited set of information, data understanding. It never hurts to ask more questions, get more input and try to do more perspective-taking. Try to understand the other person's perspective. And that really helps a lot. And then the other piece of advice that I would

give would be, if it starts to get heated would be to slow down and cool down. Quite often our reactions may be more visceral than they need to be.

David Lowry: 18:14

Chalk one up for your wife today. And we may have one of those helper lines like they do on those shows where she can call in and give us more advice. That's good advice. You can pretty quickly narrow your friendship circle down if everybody has to agree with you on everything-- the right religion, the right political viewpoint, the right views of what's good, bad, right, or wrong. And what makes something good and what makes something wrong and so forth. This is a big old world, yes, it is. With a lot of people doing a lot of different things and they feel perfectly fine doing them. And they seem to have a really great life as well. Maybe we could learn something. Hmm.

Don Drew: 18:52

Mm hmm.

David Lowry: 18:53

Don, our Jewish friends say the Torah is diminished by every voice that isn't heard. What a thought. I have always respected that statement. In other words, sure, we have our ideas, traditions, and history, but let's hear it. Let's hear what you have to say. And that's a really healthy point of view.

Don Drew: 19:11

The world gets expanded that way, doesn't it?

David Lowry: 19:14

It does. That's our talk about the Spiral of Silence. To make a concluding remark, whenever you find yourself wanting to shut down somebody else take a pause and say, tell me more, tell me about your viewpoint. Start asking questions. And whenever you see somebody trying to shut everybody else down, take a pause, raise your finger in the air and say, just a moment. I've been glad to listen to everybody, but I'd like to give a different point of view. In other words, speak up and say what you need to say. The Spiral of Silence, if you allow it to happen, only creates more frustration, more tension, and certainly not a peaceful life.

Don Drew: 19:53

That's right, David. It's important for us to remember that when we are silent, we are leaving a voice out that needs to be heard.