A Guide to Handing Opinionated People

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Guest: David Lowry, Don Drew

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Don Drew: 0:30

Hello and welcome to Peaceful Life Radio, your place on the internet for cultivating a more peaceful life by learning how to grow your life and relationships. With me today is my good friend David Lowry. How are you today, David?

David Lowry: 0:41

Life is good. I'm glad to be here because we're going to be talking about how to handle opinionated people. I don't know if you've met very many of those. You cloister yourself around really wonderful people.

Don Drew: 0:55

Once or twice it's happened to me.

David Lowry: 0:56

Yes, but I think it's a good topic to speak about.

Don Drew: 1:00

I agree. But before we start, let's remind our listeners to visit our Facebook page and like, download, and subscribe to our Peaceful Life podcast. Also be sure to let others know about this program as well. Let's get the word out.

David Lowry: 1:13

Thank you, Don. This is a good program that's helping a lot of people, and we want everybody to know about it. We've entitled this episode, A Guide to Handling Opinionated People. We run into opinionated people every day. They're in our families, our friends, social media, work, they're everywhere. Sadly, sometimes maybe I'm one of those people. But, interacting with opinionated people can be both challenging and rewarding. And their strong views can sometimes create interesting discussions or maybe they lead to arguments and conflicts.

Don Drew: 1:48

David I've used this phrase before, opinions are like noses, everybody has one. And it's true, opinions are everywhere,

David Lowry: 1:54
You said opinions are like noses. I have a lower opinion of those, yeah. Yeah. A lower part of the body but we all have them, right? And they're based on your personal experience, your knowledge, your feelings.

Don Drew: 2:08
But how do we tell the difference between somebody who has an opinion or is expressing an opinion and somebody who we could refer to as opinionated?

David Lowry: 2:16
That's a good question. Just because somebody speaks up, disagrees with us or says something rather forcefully doesn't necessarily mean they're overly opinionated or that they're rude or anything like that. It could be, but basically we all have beliefs and judgments, right? The main thing is it open for discussion?

Don Drew: 2:35
Several years ago, I came up with this a way of being when I'm asked about an opinion or feeling about a strong issue in the moment, I'll say, well, this is what I believe today. Ask me again tomorrow.

David Lowry: 2:46
I love that. And one of the things I add to it is well, that's the story I'm telling myself. That's my way of saying, this is where I am today on this subject. My opinions have changed over time. And I'm doing my best to be more open minded when people explain or express their opinions and not be too quick to challenge them but to listen more and to learn more about that. But an opinionated person is often inflexible, right?

Don Drew: 3:15
They are going to be expressing their opinions probably more forcefully and confidently. They're going to very much at least tell themselves that they believe very strongly in the opinion that they're holding. And it may be resistant to considering alternative views, other ideas, other ways of viewing things, different frames and so on.

David Lowry: 3:31
I don't know if our listeners have listened to this podcast that we put out, but it's called The Spiral of Silence. And sometimes what happens is when people feel really comfortable in their group where they think everybody believes the same way they do, then they're quite forceful about their opinions. They'll say something and think everybody's going to agree. But what they don't realize is there might be somebody in the group who doesn't

believe like that at all. And they close up and don't want to talk because they feel like what's the point? I'm the only one here that believes differently. It'll cause a lot of problems and everything. What's some of the things you feel When a person's coming on a little too strong,

Don Drew: 4:12

That's a great question. Generally I feel a frustration because from the get go, they seem as though they're unwilling to listen or to accept alternative viewpoints or new information. And Sometimes that's can lead to resentment because they seem unchanging, unlistening and unwilling to consider other viewpoints. Rarely do I feel angry with somebody like that. But it could occur in a situation where we're talking about a topic that's important to me and that I feel very strongly in a different way. But it's also really easy to fall into the trap of becoming opinionated or basically countering that opinion with my strong opinion and we're not going to get anywhere. The negative outcomes that can come from these kinds of conversations or interactions are very problematic. I don't necessarily have a problem with feeling powerlessness in that conversation, but I certainly can understand how some people particularly if somebody is presenting themselves as an expert or as somebody who has leverage over another individual by terms of position or whatever. So, there can be a lot of negative stuff that comes out of dealing with an opinionated person.

David Lowry: 5:19

Sometimes we feel resentment. For instance, if a person acts like their opinion is better or higher minded than yours, like, how could you disagree with this? How could you be a fine upstanding person and believe that point of view? So, sometimes life isn't as clear cut as it's presented to us. Sometimes problems are complex and you may think you hold the right opinion, the one that's more socially just or better for humanity or the most religious opinion or something like that. But sometimes the issue goes way deeper than the opinionated person is allowing it.

Don Drew: 5:58

Yeah, we're not just talking about a negative impact on feelings, there's negative outcomes that are going to occur from it. You mentioned one, the spiral of silence, which really ends up with a stalled conversation. People are not going to respond or they're going to walk away and that is not giving the opinionated person any feedback or ideas to even possibly work with. If it's a bad enough conversation, it can damage relationships. I've seen this happen before where people get in a conversation with somebody who's very forceful and opinionated on their thing, whatever that is, and it makes the other person feel like the opinionated person is trying to run over them. And so it can damage

relationships, can damage conversations, can reduce self esteem. At the very least, because of all this impact on feelings and outcomes, it can increase stress that others feel around a person who's being very opinionated.

David Lowry: 6:51
This is a true story. I was with a group of friends for five years. And I was the minority political view in that group. And, I'm okay with that. I understand that my opinions are going to be different from others. But what I didn't appreciate was our group would get together and immediately people would go into politics knowing how I felt about stuff, not caring and being insulting. I said, Hey, the, I really like you guys. Could we talk about something else? I mean, I appreciate you have these opinions when I'm not around to share them and all, but I feel really uncomfortable week after week, with all this conversation, besides that's not even what this group is for. We had a group with a particular reason for meeting. And they said, Oh yeah, yeah. We're sorry about that, but they kept on doing it. In frustration after months of this going on, I walked out of the group. I said, I've asked You to honor my request. You can't stop yourselves. And I understand that. But I can't take it. It's too painful to sit in this group and put up with it. Maybe some would say you should be able to take all of that. But, when you feel like you're being singled out for your opinion or that there's no respect for your opinion or another point of view, and when other people feel that. We don't care what you think. This is what we think. And we're going to talk about it all we want, just listen to it. You can't have it both ways. So, I felt so disrespected that I left and never came back. I never did want to be in that group anymore. Why would I want to get beat up all the time?

Don Drew: 8:22
Yeah, I love what you said there about point of view. So, when I think of an opinion I think of it as being more a point of view. In space science they talk about parallax. Okay. Where we are in the earth determines what the sky night sky looks like and so forth. So, it's our position in the world. It's our history. It's our learning. It's many things that make up our point of view. And one of the ways that we change that point of view is by changing our position, taking in new information, being in a new place. So, healthy opinions are thought of as points of view as opposed to a downscaled form of being opinionated.

David Lowry: 8:58
Exactly. Opinions, they're just points of view and they're not necessarily positive or negative, but it's the way that you express those positive or negative points of views. I have them, you have them. And it's important to understand that it's a challenge if we become rigid, insensitive, or dominating.

Don Drew: 9:18

So Let's take a little bit of a deeper dive into why individuals become opinionated. which is a good thing to know by understanding some of the root causes that drive an opinionated person to be that way. For instance, let's think about personality type, right? Some people are naturally more assertive and dominant.

David Lowry: 9:35
In the Enneagram there's a leader personality that's commonly a one. It's really fun to study the Enneagram. But my point is that certain personality types take charge, let's get this thing going. And they naturally take want to lead the charge. To expect that person not to say what they're thinking is to rage against the tides. Just get real. That person is going to be expressive of what they think. They're not shy about it. You might take a different person, who is more thoughtful, reserved, more of a helpful type of person, they're more reluctant to express what they think because they're thinking I, need to know more about them and so on. Those two can be in conflict. So, just because you hear a strongly worded opinion, it could be that's their personality type.

Don Drew: 10:23
There are some people who have a tendency to dominate conversations and force their opinion. It seems like it's already part of who they are. It is hardwired, I think into their personality, but it also speaks to the motivation. Dominating a conversation, for instance, is an attempt to control.

David Lowry: 10:43
Yeah, exactly. Another one is people can have personal experiences that make them believe they know what they're talking about, and they're very opinionated on that. Years ago my wife was going through nerve pain, and she had 10 level pain every single day. And I remember saying, man, I wish the doctor would give her some pain medicine. And a guy across the table says, you don't want that. And he began to tell a story about how he became addicted to opioids, and it took him 20 years to get off of it. That experience made him very opinionated on that subject, right?

Don Drew: 11:16
Let's talk more about personal experience for just a moment. As you know, I was a professor in a business college for 24 years. And I've always been a little adverse to certain kinds of business books, particularly written by CEOs who have been successful because I'm one of those people that tends to believe we learn a whole lot more from failure than we do success. But usually people who are successful and write books, they write books about how they were successful and the interpretation of that or the way they, they have interpreted it themselves is they figured it out. They did it right. They had success because

they did X, Y, Z. And if you do X, Y, Z. You can be successful too. But one of the lessons I've learned as a professor and person is that there really are no silver bullets. Every situation is different. Every organization is different. You can become opinionated about what is successful, the right way to do things and so forth. It's really easy to do because your experience tells you, that worked I'm going to do it again. And you may be right, or parts of that may be right, or you may be dead wrong. And that's a hard lesson.

David Lowry: 12:23
I think things can work for some people that don't work for others because their attributes are totally different. I was offered an opportunity to buy a radio station one time. Could I make it successful? Well, if I was willing to put in 90 hour weeks, like some people I've known who bought radio stations, maybe I could, right? I think I had the knowledge and the training and the background to be successful in that industry. What I didn't have was the desire to work that much.

Don Drew: 12:51
Let's talk about how we prioritize our relationships. We want to value connections with people and so part of that is to find common ground. When two people first meet, for instance, quite often they'll ask about their work and part of that. question is to find out what kind of common ground we have, what kind of background, what can we talk about? And that leads to is an open exchanging of ideas and opinions and so on. And we get a good, healthy, ongoing conversation. And it's a give and take. We both learn from that. We can look in that, that kind of a positive relationship for shared beliefs, attitudes, and values. And the truth is that we are going to find out on some things we strongly disagree. Where we have prioritized openness and understanding, we can learn from each other. We can grow with each other. And I think that's really critical. People who are so opinionated that we are unable to have an open conversation where we each can learn from that process, it's a dead end street.

David Lowry: 13:50
We're hoping on Peaceful Life Radio that you will put the relationship as a very treasured thing between you. If you've met a person who you care enough to develop a relationship with either as a friend or they're in your family or something, treasure that relationship and look for the things you have in common and celebrate those things. Now, I have a son in my family and we agree on a lot of political issues, but it pains my heart on some areas we don't. But I wanna celebrate the ones we do, and leave those other things alone. That's his life. That's his experience, that's his point of view. I do not want to make my relationship go into the toilet just because I'm going to push a point of view on him and try to get him to see how right I am and I don't want it to happen the other way either.

We have to respect each other. It's like, we agree up to this point. We're not going to agree beyond this point. There's so many other things to our relationship; we don't want it all ruined if you don't agree on one dimension of it. religion, politics, education, a type of work you do, sports teams, or whatever people find to divide themselves on. Why do that?

Don Drew: 15:03
But what about organizational relationships where we're in a hierarchy or something like that, where we have to work with someone as a customer and so on? Here it's good to identify a frame of personal sovereignty and exercise peaceful assertiveness in those kinds of cases where you're in a relationship that is probably less flexible

David Lowry: 15:22
I'm glad you mentioned that because sometimes we have less room for doing things our way when we're in an organization. But what I have found is that nobody thinks the same way in all these organizations. I remember thinking I have views that I strongly disagree with in my faith tradition, and I thought maybe I shouldn't even be a part of this. What I've come to realize over the years is there's a lot of people who disagree with different things. If you're looking for perfect agreement, good luck in finding that. It's normal, natural that we are going to disagree. Now, can we find those points that we do agree on and celebrate those? And do we have to make a big test of relationships for those who don't. Let's talk about sovereignty and peaceful assertiveness for just a moment. When a person's expressing opinions about something and they're doing so forcefully and it may be irritating you, you really hold all the cards. You don't have to lose your temper. You don't have to get angry or reactive. You don't have to believe it. You're in the driver's seat.

Don Drew: 16:23
You don't have to force them to believe...

David Lowry: 16:26
Your point of view. Yeah. Don't even try. Listen to them. When we talk about personal sovereignty, understand that nobody can make you change what's in your head and nobody can make you do anything you really don't want to. What gets tricky for us sometimes is we think if I express my point of view, I'm going to make somebody angry or upset or mad. No, you're not. They are going to react and choose and become angry upset or whatever or be your best buddy We don't know what they're going to do, but that's not really your responsibility. Your responsibility is to be kind respectful and say your piece whatever it is and it is what it is. You have a right to speak up because they're

certainly exercising their right to their opinion. And you have a right to say yours too. Just be respectful about it.

Don Drew: 17:18
Recognizing that your emotional response is a choice can be very liberating. It allows you to respond rather than react, and that becomes important in having open and effective communication.

David Lowry: 17:29
And asserting your right to think independently, boost your self esteem and your resilience. So you choose. And here's another thing, Don. You can choose whether or not you even want to respond or not. Just because a person's saying something doesn't mean you have to answer it or give your point of view or take it on or set the world right or any of those things. I hear crazy stuff every single day, right? I let it go by.

Don Drew: 17:57
We all do,

David Lowry: 17:58
Let it go.

Don Drew: 17:59
You bring up a great issue there, though. I love the personal sovereignty idea and the idea that I don't have to respond and so on. But sometimes I feel a little bit guilty because I let it ride. It's not that I'm not open to trying to understand their point of view. It's that I also have an opinion that is legitimate. And here somebody is being opinionated about a topic, not open to discussion, they're being aggressive and I feel like I don't even want to get involved because I don't feel like they're going to listen to me or consider any other outside viewpoint. But then I come back later and I go, I can't believe I kept my mouth shut.

David Lowry: 18:37
I have been in that situation so many times, but here's how I have come to put it together for me, Don. For me, it's this. If I think a person is invested in not understanding me, I'm not going to waste my breath. I used to try to convince people, but if they really, truly are invested in not understanding me, I'm going to leave it alone, unless there are people standing around and it's like, Hey, I'm going to answer this because four or five people are standing around and I'm I'm not going to let it ride. But at other times, yeah,

sometimes I say there's so much wrong with this conversation, I don't even know where to begin. I'm not going to set it straight.

Don Drew: 19:15
I think we both agree that it is frustrating, difficult, challenging to communicate with an opinionated person. So what are some of the ways that we can do that more effectively?

David Lowry: 19:27
I believe you always let the other person start the conversation and express themselves as fully as you possibly can. I call that communication recon. You want to know. What are they thinking? What are their reasons? And you want to flush all that out. You need to know that.

Don Drew: 19:43
How they're structuring their

David Lowry: 19:44
thinking. How they're structuring it. Is it based on opinion? Do they have some research that have led them this way? Have they had experiences? And one of the ways I get to that is to say these three words. Tell me more. So if a person says they think the mood is made out of green cheese, tell me more. I'm going to say, tell me more. I want to know.

Don Drew: 20:03
Green cheese, huh? I was like blue cheese, but

David Lowry: 20:06
You would be wrong about

Don Drew: 20:07
that. Okay. Hey, green

David Lowry: 20:07
cheese. But I'll tell you more about it.

Don Drew: 20:09
Tell, please tell me more.

David Lowry: 20:10
I found that tell me more gets a lot of information.

Don Drew: 20:14
Now you said, I really want to hear, I think that speaks to active listening. It's a need for active listening.

David Lowry: 20:20
In active listening, not only do we have to say, tell me more, we actually have to listen. That can be the painful part, right? Hearing something that we so disagree with. But you won't wilt by listening to somebody explain their point of view that you disagree with. Let them talk. And explain it back to them. Let them know you heard them. Listen, listen, listen, until you think you've got it down,

Don Drew: 20:42
My wife Christy is always telling me, ask more questions and I think it's great. Ask

David Lowry: 20:47
Ask more questions.

Don Drew: 20:49
Yeah, it both indicates you are listening in order to ask a good question. You have to be listening,

David Lowry: 20:53
Three words, tell me more, and then ask more questions. I like that. I'm going to, I'm going to add that to my repertoire.

Don Drew: 21:00
Let's talk about having empathy with a person who is being opinionated. I mean, they have arrived at something. There's some reason why they hold that opinion. I remember when I was young, I was asking my dad the difference between sympathy and empathy. And he said, sympathy is feeling sorry for somebody and empathy is feeling with somebody. And in order to feel with somebody, you have to understand how they got where they are.

David Lowry: 21:25
Sure. I think we, the thing we're trying to leave with the other person is that relationship thing we talked about earlier. I want to know what you think. Okay. I'm going to try to give you a fair hearing. I'm going to try to feed that information back to your satisfaction to show that I've listened to you. I want to know why you feel the way you feel and how you arrived at that position. And then I'm going to validate that's legitimate for you. I see

why you think the way you do, or I see why you feel the way you do. I can understand that. When a person feels fully heard magic happens. It really does. Even with an opinionated person. Sometimes I think the reason they're so dang opinionated is that they haven't felt heard. And it's like, I'm going to throw this out there, whether people like it or not.

Don Drew: 22:10
Okay. So this whole idea of listening and having empathy and so forth, does it mean necessarily that you need to address everything that person is throwing at you?

David Lowry: 22:19
Heavens no. Oh my goodness. Some people have 10 major constituent points with five sub points and yeah, you would never get through it all. And in fact maybe only one or two of them are really worth talking about anyway. Pick the ones that seem to matter the most. I think it's to your advantage to pick what appears to be the major reasons a person is giving you for something.

Don Drew: 22:44
So, when trying to counter or respond which is really what we're talking about, responding to people who are being very aggressive in their position and so on. Why is it important to use I statements? I've heard that. Many times over the years. What does that do?

David Lowry: 23:00
You take ownership for what you think. Our goal in all of this is to state clearly and to take ownership for what we think. I believe differently. I'm sorry. I don't believe this person would be the best candidate for governor, or I believe this person would be the better candidate for governor. I don't believe that set of religious beliefs. I believe in no beliefs. I believe in these beliefs. It's time to take ownership and sometimes this is a really scary thing for some people to speak up and say, I don't even know what I believe, but it isn't that. Now, what a lot of people do rather than owning their own beliefs, they begin to accuse other people by saying you are advocating that we do this, if you believe in some controversial point of view, you carry it to some extreme outcome at the end that is obviously, never going to happen. And they say, you believe in that.

Don Drew: 23:54
"You statements" tend to generate defensiveness.

David Lowry: 23:57

Very defensive behavior.

Don Drew: 23:59
Talk to me about something called fogging technique. I've heard of it. I don't really know a lot about it.

David Lowry: 24:03
There's two fogging and the broken record. And the fogging technique is basically this. It's you agree where you can and you say, you know, you're right. I agree with you on this, but I don't agree with you on this point. No, I can't agree with you here. I can't go with you that much further. You might be in the used car a lot and you say, I can agree that this is the best selling truck in America, but I can't go with you on this one. I don't want this truck. Or I have something different in mind. A person can give you their best reasons and you can say, I'll grant you that, but still this is what I want, or this is where I want to go. That's fogging. The other one is called the broken record. And it's where you clearly state what you are going to do or not going to do. It's like putting up a boundary. And when a person tries to keep changing your mind, you keep restating your position. So if a person says, this is the best sale we're ever going to have on this. Yes, but I still won't be buying today. I've told you that this is the number one selling truck in America. Yes. And I still won't be buying that truck today. I've told you that I can get you zero point financing. Yes. And I still won't be buying the truck today. It's the same thing over and over again. No matter what evidence is thrown your way, I've made up my mind. That's my decision. And I'm not going to be bullied or beaten down because you think you have all the evidence here.

Don Drew: 25:24
David, we're drawing close to end of our program today. And so I'd like to look at a couple of things like setting boundaries and a few additional tips we might leave our listeners with. A couple of the boundaries, for instance, we might consider is number one is establishing clear limits on our conversation. When the conversation becomes too intense or unproductive, it's good to at least to try to politely change the subject or end the conversation. And another thing is sometimes very talking to very opinionated people they are dead set on making their argument and they're gonna try from many different angles. So, sometimes you have to set time constraints internally for conversations or whatever you need to do to keep that from becoming too overwhelming.

David Lowry: 26:04
I believe in boundaries. If you don't want to talk about something, you have every right to say, I'm sorry, but that conversation is off limits with me. Or you have every right to say

I've spent a good 30 minutes explaining my position to you, but I think we've probably said all there needs to be said here. I don't want to talk any more about it.

Don Drew: 26:22
Any other additional tips you might have?

David Lowry: 26:24
A good sense of humor is always a good thing. I think sometimes it's good to have a good sense of humor, but I also think if you keep the goal is not to change somebody's opinion, but to, maintain the relationship and, you say, look, Lowry, I really like you. You're one of my favorite friends. I'm never going to agree with you on this particular point of view. I hope this doesn't get in the way of our really perfect friendship in every other way. Don, we've talked about how to manage opinionated conversations that we're going to have. It can be challenging. We explored the dynamics of dealing with opinionated people. trying to understand their motivations and to developing effective strategies.

Don Drew: 27:07
We discussed the importance of personal sovereignty and the power of active listening in these interactions. Remember, you can have control over responses, even when faced with strong opinions. Tune in to learn how to navigate these interactions with grace and confidence.