Communication Makeover: 5 Mind Shifts for Peaceful Conflict Resolution

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Guest: David Lowry, Don Drew

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David Lowry: Hello everyone. This is David Lowry, and my good friend, Don Drew, is alongside me. Don, what's our show about today?

Don Drew: Today's episode is about communication and peaceful conflict navigating. We'll discuss five key mind shifts that can help you transform conflict from a source of stress into an opportunity for growth, understanding, and connection.

David Lowry: This episode is for you, whether you're dealing with a difficult coworker, a family disagreement, or any other type of conflict. We're confident that the strategies we share will empower you to approach conflict with greater clarity, compassion, and effectiveness.

Don Drew: Let's get started. But before we do, I want to ask our listeners to like, download, and subscribe to our Peaceful Life Radio podcast. It only takes a minute, and it will help us out a lot.

David Lowry: Now, Don, I don't know about you, but I've made every communication mistake one can make. And I've had about every kind of conflict you can have short of weapons being drawn. But, after studying peacemaking, I've learned that most people have drama or conflict because they use the same old nasty communication habits that don't work.

It feels right when you use them, and you say, *Hey, I'm only human. What do you expect of me?* But what we want to do is change our mind to a Mind Shift. Because after today, our hope is that if you find yourself in drama or conflict, you'll say, *Okay, I feel a little energetic charge coming on. I see that there's a conflict here, and you'll know that there's a path you're going to follow.* The path is a beginning, middle, and end, and if you hold on and keep your cool a bit, you'll find that you have a great chance of resolving your conflict with minimal pain, minimal suffering, minimal emotional damage--all of those things that we hate about conflict, but you have to have these Mind Shifts in your head and say, *Okay, I know where we're going now. It's gone. It's all going to be okay.* But I have to walk this path that we're going to be talking about today. These Mind Shifts.

Don Drew: That sounds great. Let's get started.

Building Bridges, Not Walls

David Lowry: Okay. The first thing we want you to do is to have this mind shift, which means that you'll be building bridges instead of walls.

The whole idea is that you're not going to react crazy, wild, emotional, and all of that. Instead of having emotional and reactive communication, which is really the first hurdle we have to overcome, we're going for calm and effective dialog.

Taking the Bait

David Lowry: So, Don, when people tweak you one way or another, they say something, and they're intentionally baiting you to take offense. Right? I mean, there's this emotional reaction,

Don Drew: Yeah, that actually happened today.

David Lowry: Oh, really? Yeah. I mean, people want to tweak you sometimes. And then, if you fall for it, you become the bad guy. Because they say something they know is going to prod you a little, and if you lose your cool, it's, *Hey, look at that person, losing their cool! They're not as smart as they think they are.*

But what if there were another way? What if we could stop being so reactive and avoid these emotional obstacles? Let's talk about some of those emotional obstacles that you're going to find yourself in. The first one is taking offense. Have you ever thought about that, Don? You actually don't have to take offense when somebody tries to tweak you.

Don Drew: I've heard that's possible.

Do This When Someone Baits You

David Lowry: I remember it was a novel idea that when somebody's intentionally baiting you, you take a deep breath and act as though nothing's been said that would offend you in any way—not to show a frown, not to get angry-looking, not to frown, not to raise your voice, not to defend yourself, but absolutely refuse to take the bait.

The potential starts when you say, *Okay, I'm not going to let them get to me like that. I'm not going to take the bait. I'm not going to take offense. But instead, what I'm going to do is maintain the high ground and let it go.* Because my goal is to come up with a solution down the line, and I know if I get caught in this argument, we're gonna either slap each other around with our words or peck each other to death. Nothing ever gets resolved.

Managing Emotions in the Heat of the Moment

Don Drew: Yeah, that can be pretty difficult. Can't it, David? Can you share some practical tips for our listeners on how they can manage their emotions in the heat of the moment?

David Lowry: Yeah. One thing you've got to remember is that you can't shut down. When you hear people treating you unkindly, sometimes what you want to do is turn and walk away. But if you're mindful, what you can do is continue to use assertive communication. Assertive communication is. Now, I know that we're upset about this, but we've got to keep our mind on this problem. *This is the problem between us. It's not this. It's whatever our problem is, and I know that if we take a moment, we can find something that will work for both of us. What do you think we ought to be doing here?*

Or what do you think I need to know in order to move forward? The main thing is don't get emotional. Don't let your emotions get away from you.

The other thing is to listen. Listen. It's always tell me more. What do you want me to know? Just tell me more. And then, for heaven's sake, don't ever give any kind of negative feedback verbally or nonverbally.

One of the nonverbal things that people do is roll their eyes a lot. Don't do that. Instead, be calm. Take a breath. Smile. Talk in a lower voice. Refuse to go radioactive when the other person starts raising their voice to you, getting emotional.

I like to think of it this way, Don. I have four granddaughters, some of them ranging from age one to five. Okay. And they can get very emotional and reactive, right? But I never lose my cool at them when they do that because they're babies, right? I mean, we expect that of them. And we can use that same sort of logic with the people we're around when they're emotionally hijacked, and they're saying things that, honestly, they really don't mean. Or they're saying things that they think they mean, and they're hoping to bait you into it. But you can just not buy it. Just not take it and just refuse. This doesn't mean that you're giving into the conflict. It means that you're not allowing yourself to get caught up in their emotions.

The Iceberg Metaphor

Don Drew: So, David, what about the iceberg metaphor that you sometimes use? How can recognizing hidden factors behind someone's behavior help us respond more effectively to their words and actions?

David Lowry: I'm glad you brought that up. We all know that supposedly icebergs. All you see is the tip of the actual frozen object. It's a big chunk of ice floating, a nice mountain floating in the water. And we see the mountain crest of it. But below the surface, there's a lot of ice, and people are like that too.

One of the things we have to remember when people get upset and trigger is that it's not usually because of something you've done but because of something in their past that really fires up, and they may not even know what it is.

Don, I was an adopted kid. I was adopted at age three. And after many years of living here, I know more about myself than I did back in those years. But I remember what it was like to be given away. And I remember how that impacted me. And I remember wondering what I did. Feeling like, I must have really messed it up. Now, none of that was true, of course. These problems were beyond my ability to understand in my three-year-old mind. But for many years, I would feel like I wasn't good enough, I might have messed things up, or I might be ashamed. And I would trigger sometimes Because of those deeply embedded memories that had nothing to do with people around me and I didn't even understand it at the time what was going on.

Don Drew: Below the surface.

David Lowry: Below the surface. That iceberg metaphor is really true. You just have to remind yourself that sometimes the anger you see in another person has absolutely nothing to do with you.

Don Drew: So, Mind Shift 1 was going from a reactive response to being calm and using effective communication. What about Mind Shift 2?

Open-Mindedness and Collaboration

David Lowry: Our goal is to practice open-mindedness. I have never met a person who didn't think they were very open-minded. I've never met a person, nope, nope, my mind's closed, I don't want to hear anything. But actually, we can be very closed-minded. When we have drama in our lives or a problem, we want it solved, and we usually want it solved the way we want it solved, right?

And what's going to happen is that if we keep our minds open, we can hear other points of view. But if we keep our minds closed, it's like going through a maze but not knowing where to make the turns. And so, we've got to keep our minds open.

When we don't keep our minds open, we're going to miss opportunities for solving our problems. Maybe somebody is willing to meet us halfway if we'll explain what the problem is, or maybe a person has a better idea for solving a problem that each of you is experiencing. The end of the world doesn't have to happen just because you have a problem, but if you stay fixed on, I want the problem solved the way I want it solved, and usually, we become very selfish in those moments because we want it done our way, and we don't really care about the other person.

We lose a sense of relationship with the other person. The thing about *Peaceful Life Radio* that we have is that we believe relationships are really important and that when you solve problems, you're really solving relational differences. So, to solve only your part is not solving the relationship.

Don Drew: I know we do that a lot of time, David. I know what you're talking about here, but why do people tend to dig in and get stuck in their own perspectives, especially during a conflict?

David Lowry: It feels good for one thing. The other thing is people are kind of overwhelmed when they're in conflict, and they think, well, *Those people are out to take everything they can get from me.* And we label people as being unreasonable or difficult. And. It's like, *hey, I don't care. At this point, it's every person for themselves, right?* And the idea is that I'm going to get run over, or somebody's going to hurt me or take something valuable from me.

But what I've discovered is that if we're calm and collected and we decide, okay, yeah, we're going to have to go through hearing my side and your side, and we're going to have to work collectively collaboratively together. We can get to the end of this thing. But if the other side is insisting, *no, you're going to give everything to me, and I'm insisting that, no, you're going to give everything to me,* we get into this power struggle, and it's not going to work. But I'm always amazed at what happens when somebody says, *Look, I want to, I want something that works for you too. I don't want it all for me. I want it to work for you*.

I have a really great example of that recently, Don. I went through a mediation session because I've been appointed a conservative guardian over my sister, and I had to get some things from a joint estate, and, you know, people wanted more things than they were willing to give up, and that's why we were in mediation. But in the end, when we all

realized that we were trying to help each other, they were trying to help me with my sister, and I wanted to help them with their estate, it all worked out because we took care of each other and made sure that everybody got what they needed and we didn't have this posture of, *I'm going to take it all for me, or they had to take it all for themselves.*

Don Drew: David, our second Mind Shift is to practice open-mindedness and collaborative exploration with those with whom we disagree. What's next?

Avoiding Communication Gremlins

David Lowry: The third thing that we need to do is to watch out for those poor communication choices that we make. And those have to do with bickering back and forth. Instead of, you said this. I did not say that. You said this. And all those little crazy things like you hear children do, adults do, just as bad or worse where we blame each other, we shame each other. We accuse each other. We try using guilt on each other, and all of those things are fairly manipulative if you really get down to it. It's our way of saying you should have done that. You should know better, or you should not have ever done that. Or if you had only done what I asked you to do weeks ago, we wouldn't be in this fix.

People resort to those kinds of communication approaches. There's a better way, and that is to have more prepared communication. Instead of bickering, we toss that out the window. Instead of blaming and shaming and all that, we deal with the problem at hand.

It may well be that you made a suggestion two weeks ago that would have saved everybody a lot of heartache and trouble, but here we are. And we can't really change the past; we can only change what's going forward. It might well be that if you had made better financial decisions at one point, there would be more money on the table today. But here we are. That's the situation we're in. And all the wishing won't roll back the clock. We have to accept what's here before us now and focus on the problem.

Avoiding those communication gremlins that make us want to blame, shame, and humiliate all those things to other people, and instead, focus on the problem before you. What is it that needs to be taken care of right here, right now? And how can you do it in a way so that each of you can walk away as friends later on?

Cultivating Self-Awareness

Don Drew: That requires quite a bit of growth and self-awareness. How can we actually cultivate our self-awareness to identify our own communication triggers and blind spots?

David Lowry: Your friends know all of your communication triggers and blind spots. You could always ask a good friend, but then you might not be a good friend after they told all of them to you.

The main thing is, Don, is empathy and respect, really. If you can imagine what it's like to be in your friend's shoes, and if you can be respectful to them, even though you don't obviously see things the same way they do, you're really well on your way to having great communication.

It's also being mindful of your own triggers. Do you know what makes you upset? I become unreasonable sometimes when I feel like I'm being disrespected, Don, and what if I took disrespect when none was intended? Well, then, I've kind of made a communication pitfall there, right? Because I can't really know everything that's in a person's mind. I may presume I do, but I can't really. So, that's why we have to be a lot more tentative in our statements and be willing to back down a little bit. Not be so sure that we know everything we think we know.

Choosing the Right Medium

Don Drew: That's great advice, David. I want to add one obstacle of my own here. Sometimes, we need to be more careful about choosing our communication medium. A lot of communication these days is done in writing. And we can easily fall into the same pitfalls in our writing by choosing inappropriate mediums.

Sometimes things need to be communicated that are important that ought not be left to email.

David Lowry: Several years ago, there were some athletes in the World Cup, and somebody said something really trashy and awful about one of the players on the other side. And when confronted about it said, *Well, I apologized on Facebook.* Well, sure, you apologized for what you said on Facebook, but a personal face-to-face apology might have been nice, or an apology could have been delivered in the way that was given in the first place, which was in an interview on television. That might have been nice, too, using the appropriate medium or the appropriate channel of communication.

Don Drew: Okay. Our third Mind Shift was replacing poor communication choices with prepared and thoughtful or thought-through communication. What's next on the list?

Abundance Mentality vs. Zero-Sum Game

David Lowry: Hurdle four is this idea that I'm dealing with a zero-sum game versus an abundance mentality. One of the gremlins that keeps us from solving communication problems is that we think we have only so much available to us, and we've got to get as much of it as we possibly can. So, if we're dividing up a pie and you're a kid, you think I want to get the biggest piece of pie that I can get. Or if you're an adult and you're dividing up the land, you want to figure out how you can get the best and most choice piece of land

What we've got to do, of course, is remember that if we focus on the relationship and giving everybody a bit of what they need, what does it take to get what you need? There's usually enough available for us all to do that. We may not get the Cadillac version of what we need, but we'll have what we need to get by. We've got to move from having it all to realizing that, *Hey, there's enough here for us all to get something.*

Win-Win Solutions

Don Drew: What are some practical steps we can take to explore win-win solutions in conflict?

David Lowry: We have to be careful about self-serving solutions. We always want the best for ourselves and try to create a situation where I win, and you lose that win-lose mentality. If we avoid those, we're probably going to do fine. I always go back to

keeping it relational. Make sure that it's good for you, good for them, and good for your relationship.

Don Drew: Okay, our fourth Mind Shift is moving from a zero-sum outlook to an abundance mentality. Next on the list is...

Challenging Assumptions

David Lowry: Challenging assumptions about others. One of the things we have to avoid doing and saying is, *Well, that's a difficult person.* Because Don, when I tell somebody that so and so is a difficult person, that's giving myself permission to forget any kind of problem-solving. It's like saying, *What do you expect? You can't solve a problem with that person. They're impossible.*

The truth is, some people are difficult for us, but they may not be difficult for somebody else. Labeling somebody is difficult. It may well mean that we're giving ourselves permission to check out of problem-solving. So, let's avoid labels.

Labels are self-fulfilling prophecies, too. If I come into the thing saying that person's going to be a real piece of work to deal with. Maybe it'll happen that way. But if we come in saying, *I believe that person will be reasonable and just if we can approach them the right way,* or if we make sure from the very beginning that we show that it's not all about us, but we are considering them as well, those labels can fall away.

The other one is people saying I can't speak up for myself because they're my boss or they have power over me in some way. As though that grants them immunity from ever talking to them about your problems. I can't ask them for a raise because what if they get offended? Or if I have a problem at work, I can't let them know that I have a problem at work.

But honestly, we're going to spend the rest of our lives avoiding problems if we have to count on who has power over us. Sometimes, you really need to go, even if it's a person who has power over you, and say, here's what our problem is, and I'd like to get it resolved. Just because a person has say so or authority over you doesn't mean that they're immune from problem-solving solutions.

Challenging Our Assumptions

Don Drew: So, how can we challenge our own assumptions in healthy and respectful ways?

David Lowry: I go back to the thing we said at the beginning of our program. That is, *we want to build bridges, not walls*. So, we take each of these Mind Shifts, staying calm and not being reactive, avoiding a fixed position, being careful that we don't become close-minded, avoiding poor communication choices when we deal with other people by blaming and shaming and criticizing, and so forth, and avoid this zero-sum mentality and instead look for an abundance mentality. If we do that and we avoid criticizing others or assuming that they're difficult or that because they have power over us, we can't solve this problem, I think we'll find that we've overcome so many of the hindrances that keep people in drama perpetually and unable to solve their conflicts.

Taking Action and Transforming Conflict

Don Drew: So, to wrap this up for our listeners, I think we need to remember that we have the power to choose how we respond to any conflict. By embracing these five Mind Shifts and taking action, we can transform conflict from a source of stress into an opportunity for growth, understanding, and connection.

Conclusion

David Lowry: Thank you so much, Don. I appreciate you very much.