

ADVENTURES IN BEHAVIOUR CHANGE - TRACY FINK

(Katie Elliott & Tracy Fink)

Tracy Fink is the founder of the Tortoise Institute which offers science-based programs focusing on building emotional intelligence, compassion and resilience. She's a frequent speaker on topics including 'Navigating Difficult Conversations' and her most recent work explores the art of negotiation.

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Tracy, welcome!

Thanks Katie, happy to be here!

We've chatted before about various things, but today I've been hoping that we could talk a little bit about the new work that you're developing on the subject of negotiating. Could you tell us a bit about what you've been up to?

Yeah. I took a course at Harvard on negotiations and emotions. So, how do emotions play into the success of our negotiations? How do we check in with ourselves? How do we realise maybe what's triggering us? How do we identify what the other person is bringing to the negotiation? So it's really going deeper than the issue on the table.

When I think of the word negotiation, I often think of something that's quite focused on getting what you want at all costs. I imagine some sort of give and take, but I do perceive it as something where you're really focusing on getting a certain outcome for yourself. But what you're describing sounds much more of a self-awareness type practice.

Well, negotiations in the past had been defined as adversarial, it's 'I win, you lose'. And like you said, at all costs, you know, get the best deal for yourself. And what we're seeing now is that the most successful negotiations are where we both win, where we both get something that will make that pie bigger. It's not about if I win and you lose this pie stays the same, I just get a bigger proportion of that pie. But what we're looking to do now is through this interest-based negotiation is to actually make the pie bigger by adding and creating value.

How do you create an environment where negotiation happens that way? For example, if you're going into a situation where you're wanting to find some sort of agreement with someone and they are coming from that traditionally adversarial place, how do you shift the dynamic to give a sense that actually something bigger is possible?

It's mostly by engagement, by talking to somebody. And there's this process part of the

negotiation where it's like a pre-negotiation, if you will, where you start to talk about what your interests are, where you're coming from and asking questions. It's okay to ask questions and to find out where that other person is coming from because they have information that is important to you and you have information that's important to them. And the way that you get to it is by asking questions and also putting the relationship front and centre, because we don't want to walk away from any negotiation with bad feelings because likely the person who you're negotiating with is in your life, whether it be in your work life or in your home life. So the relationship has to remain intact and solid. So the idea of engagements and the priority being the relationship will be very helpful to have it be a conversation more than a battle, if you will.

So are there particular ways of opening that kind of conversation? Have you got any advice for the kinds of things that you could say to pave the way for that sort of interaction between two people?

Yeah. I mean, you can start by developing a conversation and inviting the person to share their interests and values with you. You really want to find that really good balance between empathy - I hear you, I see you - and assertiveness, by advocating for what you need and what for what you want. Sometimes when we're too empathetic we tend to give it all away. But that idea of that balance between I hear you, and this is where I'm coming from. And it's okay to share that, you know, to share what your interests are and what your needs are and what you want from the negotiation. It's okay to share, like we think that we have to be so secretive and not start first. You know, I don't want to put my cards on the table first. I think when you have these conversations, the issues start to emerge and then you get to hear what's the most important thing.

Hmm. And in terms of body language, like the way you position yourself relative to someone else, are there any kind of techniques for creating a space or a way of being with another person that can make it less threatening that can make it easier to be together?

Yeah. That's a great question. If you can find a way to position yourself where you're kind of sitting on the same side, instead of being across the table with arms folded. Or maybe sitting in chairs without a barrier in between you two, like a desk or a table, but really sitting facing each other, you know, without anything in between - those are good ways. Also negotiations don't always have to be in a formal setting. So depending on the relationship, maybe it's over a few drinks, maybe it's over a meal. And if the conversation starts to get a little too heated, you can bring it back to your common interests or give yourself a little break. Or even if you start to feel like you're losing your train of thought, or you're getting too triggered, you can always get up and excuse yourself and give yourself a few minutes to regroup and calm down and offer yourself a little bit of compassion because you know, negotiations, especially for salaries or jobs, it's not easy. And so you need to have an element of kindness towards yourself during this process.

Something I've been experimenting with is trying to picture - when there's maybe a difficult

situation or a difficult conversation to be had - I think in the past, I imagined myself across from someone, like you said, and you talk about sitting next to someone - I find it really helpful to imagine that the issue is something you can put on the table in front of you and you can both look at it and then you're together saying, what can we do about this? Somehow that feels completely different to me, but I don't really know why.

Well because you're taking the personal out of it. And it's also a collaborative problem-solving effort. I love that visual because I think it's a joint effort to solve a problem or to come to an agreement without me thinking that I'm better or you're better or... I think when you think of it that way it makes the playing field more level. We're trying to come to something together.

And definitely the idea of making it feel less personal - because that's what tends to happen, isn't it? - that it becomes me versus you when actually it's just a situation that we're both facing.

Yes. But also what happens is we carry our emotions with us. And sometimes it's not about the issue at hand, but it's about whether I feel that you've appreciated me. Or that I have autonomy, I have any kind of power in this situation. Or that, you know, maybe my sense of belonging or your sense of belonging feels threatened, or my role in this has become questionable. So then it's not even about the issue, but it's about the feelings around this negotiation that could really derail it if we don't address those underlying core components. You know, do I feel appreciated? Do you feel appreciated? Do you feel like there's a sense of belonging? There's five core components that really most people bring to a negotiation and they need to be addressed and met. It is affiliation, appreciation, autonomy, role and status, and no matter what the issues are at hand, those five components play a role in how the outcome is.

And can you say just a little bit more about those? So affiliation was the first one...

Affiliation is, do I belong here? Do I have a sense of value or purpose? Am I part of the team? Autonomy? Do I have control over the outcome? Are you taking away any of my power or ability to make decisions? Appreciation? Do you appreciate the work that I've done, what I brought to the table, the history that I've had here? And we see that a lot in family business negotiations where there's the transfer of leadership or power from one generation to another, and you see the matriarch or patriarch feeling so unappreciated. You know, 'I created this thing!' And sometimes they could dig their heels in just because they don't feel appreciated, rather than solving the problem for the greater good of the organisation. The fourth is role - during this negotiation, where do I fit in? What is my role? What is my job? And status. You know, am I diminished in the eyes of the other people through this negotiation? You know, people feel like if they've enjoyed a particular status, they want to keep that somehow close to them.

Yes. And a lot of the work that you do is in a workplace setting, but I mean, these are all

equally applicable, aren't they? Because negotiation, isn't just something that happens when you're trying to agree on a salary or a role or whatever it is. We're all negotiating all of the time.

Absolutely. You know, we do it with our children, if we have children. I have adult children. So there's a lot of negotiation. And there's also a lot of checking in with myself. Is this about me feeling unappreciated? Or where's my role here? Or is it really about the issue at hand? And, you know, we really have to check in with ourselves. It's also with your partner, you negotiate on a daily basis, who's going to, you know, take out the trash. So even things like that, if it's not clearly defined, or you know, what's for dinner tonight? So even things like that ends up being a negotiation, hopefully not adversarial.

So you were saying that very often we bring our own emotions into the picture and they can really affect how we're able to interact with somebody else. Are there any signs that we can look out for? How do we know when that's happening? Because in the heat of the moment, very often we just feel stuff and then words come out of our mouths, which we may later regret. But you talk about checking in. How can you develop a reflex to check in and find out what's honestly going on on the inside so that you have the best chance of negotiating well with somebody else?

Well, I think like anything, the more you practise, the better you get at this, and in this particular case, one of the things that I've noticed is you practise taking a pause. And when you're in a conversation or negotiation, which is essentially a conversation, when you feel those bodily messages and the information that our body is giving us, especially when we've been triggered, we can take a pause and check in. There's no rule book that says you have to respond immediately and that you don't have a minute to give yourself some time to breathe. Label, you know, label some of the physical, the physiological sensations. My cheeks are hot. My heart is racing. And just simply noticing that can actually begin to lessen the intensity of the feelings that it's bringing. Building this self-awareness takes practise. But recognizing that there's power in that pause - when we take the pause, we actually are able to find some different solutions, rather than that knee-jerk reaction. You know, the way we've always behaved or the way that we think we need to react. When you take the pause, there's actually room for some creative solutions and problem-solving. And you can even say, I need a minute here. Or you can excuse yourself, or you can walk away or you can, you know, calmly take a three-breath interlude and you don't have to say, you know, I need a minute. But when you deliberately breathe, nobody's going to rush you, 'come on, come on, come on', nobody's going to say that.

Something I've become aware of, as I've been practising those kinds of things just in my everyday life, is that the more you are aware of what's going on on the inside and the more you're able to articulate those things in an impersonal way, simply like taking responsibility for yourself and saying, 'I'm noticing that right now I feel quite upset'. There's not really, I mean, I imagine somebody could hear an accusation in that, but essentially you're just saying you feel quite upset. And I'm thinking about those five things that you listed. You

know, if you say right now, 'I'm noticing that I would just love to feel appreciated. I feel like I've worked really hard. And I don't know if anyone notices and I feel a bit sad about that'. Sometimes saying those things, actually being able to put them out there seems to be a very powerful way of eliciting a compassionate response from other people. Because, I don't know, even when you were listing them and talking about people not feeling appreciated, I could feel it in my heart.

Of course.

That sense of, 'Oh, of course! It's horrible not to feel appreciated.'

Yeah. And it causes you to do things that you probably wouldn't do, but you're feeling very vengeful or angry. But to your point, I mean, how lovely would it be if people could articulate their inner turmoil without blaming somebody else and just the way you posed it, 'I feel such and such'. It's not saying, 'You are making me feel this way', because when we put it on the other person, that's when the defence happens. But so often that's what we do because it's hard to be vulnerable. And it's hard to really identify, you know, what's coming up for us. Thinking, oh, this might be a self-fulfilling prophecy. I think that I'm less than, therefore I'm less than - what you said made me feel less than, but I already felt less than, you know what I mean?

Yeah.

So I mean this whole idea of emotional intelligence, yes. Being able to apply language to our feelings would be so helpful rather than how it usually comes out as a blame or rage or barbed words that we want to hurt somebody else because we are feeling our own pain.

Yes. And also it's really easy to imagine that the other person would want what you want and to make that assumption. But when we start communicating how we feel and what we need, very often those things can fit together really nicely. So if we assume that somebody wants the role that we want and we're going to fight them for it, it can come as a surprise to discover that they never wanted that in the first place. They just wanted a little bit of acknowledgement or whatever it might be. So the more we can express ourselves, honestly, the more we can get creative about finding solutions that work for both of us.

Absolutely. And that's why I also said, like, in that process with the negotiation where you would begin with a dialogue, that's where we can find out those motivators. What's gonna make you happy? And it's okay to ask that and how you answer can shape the conversation. But the thing is, we forget that people want to be happy and they think that what they're doing will make them happy. We often look at it only through our eyes, rather than looking through their eyes and what's at stake for them. Each person has something at stake and it's deeper than the issue at hand it's, am I competent? Am I worthy of love and respect? And so when we recognise that, it actually makes the conversation much

easier and it makes negotiation more heart-centred rather than adversarial, and it's not from a place of weakness, it's actually from a place of strength.

Well, I'm wondering if you can think of a Little Challenge relating to the subject of negotiation? Is there something that you could suggest that we could try?

Well, I am going to use an example of something that happens at home. My adult son recently moved back into the house and I have been used to, you know, my house looking a certain way and feeling a certain way. And he had come home and his stuff was just all over the place. And I came downstairs in the morning, like hard charging. 'What a mess! And, 'He has no respect and he doesn't care!' And, 'He has to leave!' You know, these stories that we've made up. And when he woke up, I actually, I might've even woken him up. That's how hijacked I was by my own emotions. And what had happened was he had car problems. He ended up having to wait for assistance. He got home very late. You know, he just put down everything that was in his hands, put his shoes away, threw his stuff down and went to bed and he was going to fix it in the morning. But I happened to have woken up before him. And he was so upset too, because of what had happened. So it really stopped me in my tracks and - reminder again, that it's not only what I think. People have experiences that they bring to the table and that, you know, rather than making assumptions, it's really important to ask questions. What happened? Are you okay? This is so unlike you. And that if I would have taken the pause and not been so hijacked by my anger and my story, I would have realised this is not like him. He doesn't treat the house like that. He really does have more respect for the situation, but I got caught up in it. And then I had to forgive myself after that and realize, okay, I'm probably not the only one that this has happened to right here is where I need a little more compassion for myself and for him.

So there's something in that about when you notice that you're feeling a big response to something, to choose to pause for a moment? And then after that to come back from a place of curiosity?

Absolutely. The problem is when we're in that moment, to remember to pause is difficult. So what I really now try to look at - it's yes, of course, I'd like to take a pause, but how quickly do I recover from it? If I forget to take the pause and I notice that I've gone down a path, how quickly can I bring myself back? And that's what I'm paying attention to now. In negotiations, in relationships and all of these interactions that I have with people, we are still human beings and we still fall off the wagon and are imperfect and create these judgements and these habits and assumptions. And now what I'm really working on through this compassionate lens is, how quickly can I pay attention to the information that my body is giving me. Like you said, through language and labelling. And also through meditation, you know, that has been very helpful in recognising when I've interjected with story. The story is not helpful. It's just an old habit. It's like an old friend that shows up when we're feeling vulnerable or desperate or angry. Those old stories that accompany us sometimes are no longer welcome, but not until we start paying attention to them are we

able to realise, ' Oh yeah, that's not true anymore'.

So the more we can pause, the more we can be curious about what's going on for someone else, but also be curious about what's going on in us, then that opens up the possibility of a whole range of creative responses rather than just a knee-jerk reaction?

Creative and compassionate. Yeah. Because we're all just trying to do the best that we can here.

I love human beings. I feel the older I get, the more I chuckle at myself because it's impossible to take oneself seriously, isn't it? After a while you just realise that you can only have an attitude of fond amusement, I think is what I'm trying to cultivate because, quite frankly, I'm ridiculous. And I don't know about anybody else, but I suspect on the inside, we're probably all a bit ridiculous and the more we can do to embrace that... If people would like to find you online, where's the best place for them?

Well, my website is the TortoiseInstitute.com and I'm also on LinkedIn at Tracy Fink and on Instagram at the Tortoise Institute.

Thank you so much. I've so enjoyed talking with you and it's kind of shifted my perspective on negotiation. I think I see it differently now, so thank you.

Oh, you're welcome. I see it totally differently now. And I think the more that we can share this with other people, the more people will get what they want and feel good about it and maintain and preserve those relationships. So thank you so much, Katie.

I like the sound of that. Thank you.