

Ep #44: Conflict Conversations



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With Your Host

Kori Linn

Ep #44: Conflict Conversations

This week we're talking about conflict conversations.

You are listening to Love Your Job Before You Leave It, the podcast for ambitious, high-achieving women who are ready to stop feeling stressed about work and kiss burnout goodbye forever. Whether you're starting a business or staying in your day job, this show will give you the coaching and guidance you need to start loving your work today. Here's your host, Career Coach, Kori Linn.

Hey y'all, happy Wednesday. I hope you're doing great. I'm doing pretty well, I just got back from a pretty long walk. It's not a Wednesday for me, but it will be a Wednesday when you hear this. And my walk was really beautiful. I love the neighborhood of Sacramento we moved to because there are all of these really beautiful old growth trees and so many interesting plants to see on my walks.

And if you sometimes want to see pictures of the plants that I see, I'm often sharing those in my Instagram stories. So you can follow me on my Instagram @korilinn if in addition to learning how to love your job before you leave it you also want to see some pretty plants that are part of my day to day life.

This week we are talking about conflict and especially, or specifically about conflict conversations. I mentioned in a podcast episode a while back having a conflict conversation and a listener wrote in and wanted to learn more about what this was. So I decided to do a whole podcast on it.

Basically what the listener was asking was if we have thought work, which is the name of the coaching tool I'm always teaching you. Which is how to think differently about things, how to change your thoughts so you can have different feelings, have different actions, and create different results in your life. If we can change our thoughts, why would we ever have a conflict conversation?

This is a great question and I think it's really common for people who learn the coaching tools that I teach and for people who are studying the idea of mindset there is so much freedom and so much choice in simply being able

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to think differently about things so that we can have a different experience about them, even if the things outside of us don't change at all.

That being said, for me at least, the point is not we change our thoughts so that we don't change anything else or don't ask for anything else to change. Obviously, some stuff is outside of our control, but I am a firm believer in asking for what we want. And I think there's still a lot of room to have that be part of what we're doing even if we're choosing to manage our own thoughts and manage our own mindset first.

So this is kind of like the podcast episode on when to leave your job. And the short answer is whenever the fuck you want for whatever reason you want. Because you're an adult and you get to decide. So that's kind of this too.

You can change your thoughts about anything, and that is magical and has magical results. But you also aren't required to change your thoughts about anything ever. And even when we do change our thoughts, we may still want to have a conflict conversation. We may still want to ask for what we want.

So a great example of this is institutionalized oppression. There's a lot of institutionalized oppression, there's sexism, there's racism, all these things, ableism. And I personally want to address those things in my work and in my life.

I might still choose to manage my mindset about them first and to decide on purpose how I want to think about them and to shift from my default thoughts. Especially since my default thoughts are usually informed by the very structures that I want to dismantle.

If I have, for instance, sexism embedded in my brain, in my thought patterns from growing up in a sexist culture and then I go to try to dismantle sexism with those thoughts, that might not work out so well for me. So first examining those thoughts and changing our thoughts to create different feelings, actions, and results is really powerful. But it doesn't mean we

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don't go back and engage with others outside of our own thoughts to create the changes we want to see in the world.

So when this comes to a conflict conversation, I think when I initially referenced this, I was probably talking about a conflict conversation with my partner because at this point in my career I work alone. I mean, I work with my clients, but I don't have colleagues inside my business. I don't have direct reports, yet. Although probably coming soon I will be thinking about bringing people in to help me with my business because it's growing.

But most of the conflict conversations I have in my life at this point are with my partner. But this is a really useful tool also, for peers at work, for direct reports at work, for your supervisors at work, for other people in your life who aren't related to your work life. It's just a great tool.

So what is it? What is a conflict conversation? Conflict conversation is, in its own right, a thought. There's no fact about what that is. But to me a conflict conversation is when we choose to have a conversation with someone about something that we anticipate there may be conflict about.

Maybe they've done something we don't agree with. Maybe they haven't done something we do want to see them do. Maybe we asked them to do something, and they didn't follow through and they're our direct report and now we have to have a conversation about it. There's lots of different examples of what this could look like.

And then the question is, why have them? And again, for whatever reason you want. But to me, the reason to have a conflict conversation is because I want to create greater connection between me and someone else. And I will maybe want to create a more effective workflow between us or in whatever area we're overlapping in.

So in my relationship, Alex is amazing, obviously. She's a super amazing person. Y'all know she's just incredible. And she's all the things. She's warm, she's kind, she's funny, she's so supportive. Honestly, it's incredible how supportive she is.

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And we're both humans and sometimes we have conflict. Sometimes she does things and then I am like, "I don't want you to do those things." Sometimes she doesn't do things and I'm like, "I want you to do these things." And sometimes she does the exact things I want her to do, but not the way I wanted her to do them.

So for someone like me who used to be a people pleaser, but also has kind of ridiculously high standards and expectations for myself and others, this is an interesting thing for me. Because what my brain, if I don't coach it, wants to do is either one, avoid it, ignore it, and pretend I'm happy. That's the people pleasing. But then the other thing my brain, if I don't manage it, wants to do is be really exacting, and criticize anything that isn't to the tiniest degree, exactly what I wanted.

So first of all, you can just see how those two inclinations together are sort of a recipe for disaster. That's my unmanaged mind. That's my brain not with coaching. And I had a really hard time with those two existing thought patterns. And that's part of why I went to coaching as a client. And going to coaching as a client is obviously part of how I became a coach as my career.

So those are my two things that my brain wants to do left to its own devices, those are the two patterns it has. In a relationship that I'm building I don't want to just ignore and pretend because that doesn't make it easier to have a better relationship later.

If I ignore and pretend then all we have is one, a lie. And two, Alex isn't learning anything about me that's going to help us get along better in the future. Okay, but if I just let that exacting criticizing thing go and take over, that's also not a very pleasant experience for Alex or for me.

I've talked on the podcast before about how I really love a compliment sandwich. And this morning, actually, Alex and I had some conflict. And what I realized was, I love the compliment sandwich, I'm always asking her to use the compliment sandwich with me.

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And I did not use the compliment sandwich with her because I let that exacting high standards mindset, it kind of like snuck in before I noticed it. And once I noticed I was like, "Oh, I need to apologize. That's not who I want to be in my relationship. I have tools I can employ."

So what actually happened was Alex put some cauliflower in the oven before I woke up this morning because now that we live in California, it's super fucking hot and it gets hot pretty early in the day. And running the oven during the day is not great because it makes our house real hot, and our house is already really hot.

So she gets up earlier than me. So she, first of all, ordered us a farm box. And then we got the fresh cauliflower. I never buy fresh cauliflower because I fucking hate chopping it. Could I coach myself on that? Yes. Am I going to? Never, I don't want to love chopping it. It's just a no for me.

So I never buy fresh cauliflower, but Alex likes it. And so she was like, "I'll chop it." And I was like, "Great, then we'll have that, it'll be delicious." So she chopped it, she put olive oil and salt on it, and she put it in the oven before I even got up. And then when I got up like, the cauliflower wasn't exactly the way I wanted it to be.

Y'all are really going to see in this episode how insane my brain is when it's not getting coached. Okay, so I was like, "This isn't exactly what I want." That's not who I want to be in my relationship. I want to be a person who notices what is working, who appreciate that. And that's where the compliment sandwich comes in.

So the compliment sandwich, first of all, a lot of people think the comments sandwich is bullshit and I deeply disagree. Because here's what's magical about the compliment sandwich. The compliment sandwich is not about just putting any fucking compliment you can think of in the front and the back. Abso-fucking-lutely not, that's a lying sandwich.

If you don't believe the compliment, it's not a compliment sandwich, it's a deception sandwich. No fucking deception sandwiches, okay? Because that's just people pleasing with the super critical voice in the middle and

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then some more people pleasing. That's not what the fuck we're doing here.

To properly do a compliment sandwich you have to come up with a compliment you really mean. We actually have to come up with two, because one for the front end, one for the back end, right, sandwich. Here's what that does though, we talk all the time about how the brain has negativity bias. Making your brain put your conflict information in the form of a compliment sandwich forces your brain to look for what is working and find something.

Now listen, when you're in the heat of conflict, this idea might piss you off. That's okay. When I'm in the heat of conflict, this idea sometimes pisses me off. And I still would go to bat for it, and I think it's spectacular.

So after Alex and I had a little scuffle, then I apologized because I realized I wasn't being who I wanted to be. But I also wanted to be able to share the information, even if it is super nit-picky.

Listen, y'all. I'm a super fucking nit-picky person sometimes. That's okay, I can respect and like that about myself and realize that like having high standards, is also really good in a lot of ways. But it's a tool, like any tool, and I need to be mindful about how I'm employing it and how I'm sharing the information with other people.

So we had a conversation, and I then gave her basically the same information I had already given her, but I put it inside of a compliment sandwich. And this is so cheesy, but it made me cry a little when I was saying all the things I was grateful for. And then giving the information about what wasn't exactly what I wanted, and then wrapping it up with some more stuff that I was truly grateful for that really was good.

Oh, and one more thing, so we both know, as I've already told you I have that super people pleasing part and then I have the super high standards critical part. Let me just tell you right now, I don't just take the high standards critical part and put whatever it says in the middle of the

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compliment sandwich. Because the way it says things isn't nice. And I know because the person it mostly says things to is me, about me, right?

For people who are hugely critical inside our own heads. That's usually who we're hugely critical with the most. So I know that voice very well and I know that the way it words things isn't helpful. It's not helpful to me, it's not helpful when I want to give information to Alex.

So what I do is I take the useful content out. The critical voice is being kind of a bitch, but inside that there's useful content. What is that useful content and how do I pull it out? And what this does is it allows us to share with the people that we want to share with what we actually think, feel, would like, et cetera in a way that's actually geared towards getting along with them not fighting with them.

So it might seem like the compliment sandwich is like we're sugarcoating, or we're dumbing it down, or we're making it palatable for them. That's not what the fuck we're doing. What we're doing is taking the information that we want to share with somebody and packaging it in a way that is organized to actually create more connection and resolve the conflict.

We are packaging it in a way of like, "Let's work on this together." We're packaging it in a way of like, "Yes, there's something here that's not working for me, but I have done my due diligence to see what is working to show you that, like it's almost like a sign of good faith.

Like I'm not just trying to attack you. I do see that you're doing a lot. Here is the thing that isn't 100% working for me and I want to be able to talk about that because I don't want to avoid and people please pretend like things are great when they're not because that is how you blow up fucking relationships. Let me just tell you.

Now, I'm going to tell you all, the compliment sandwich is not the only tool you can use for this, it just happens to be my favorite. And it happens to be the one that I used this morning. But if you don't want to use that exact tool, that's okay.

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But what I want to impress upon you is this idea, conflict can lead to greater connection. Conflict can lead to intimacy. And intimacy, I think, is more of a like personal relationship word. But I think there is a space for kind of a similar concept in work. Which is like it can lead to camaraderie, it can lead to a sense of being able to work really well with someone and know them really well in a work context.

So there's this famous researcher, Dr. John Gottman, he has a bunch of work. He's incredible. He focuses mostly on marriages. And one of the things he teaches about is how conflict can actually lead to more intimacy in marriage. And I've actually been reading his material since way longer than I've been a coach. And it's really impacted how I think about conflict.

But I think we can bring his ideas over into the workspace too. Whether it's corporate, small business, I don't think any of that matters. Because the thing is, many of us avoid conflict because we think it's bad and we think it's going to hurt our relationships. Whether they're work relationships or personal relationships. So just the idea that conflict can actually create more connection is a really next level idea.

So when you want to have a conflict conversation with somebody, what I want you to think about is, why do I want to have conflict? What do I want to get out of it? How can I use the conflict to bring us both together to a closer place?

Because sometimes when we're upset, we all have human brains y'all, and sometimes when we're upset there is that part of us that either wants to people please, wants to be highly critical, or wants to rub the other person's face in it because we think they're wrong.

And none of those impulses are wrong or bad. But those impulses are not going to help you have a constructive conflict conversation that leads to greater connection between you and the other party, that leads to resolution.

So when you want to have conflict with somebody, asking yourself why is really going to help you see like do I like that reason? Is it because I want

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to be closer? Is it because I want to be more connected? Is it because I want to help them know me better? But helping them know me better is maybe going to bring up some conflict as well? Or is it because we're just super pissed at them?

And if we're just super pissed at them, we might want to spend some time thinking about our own thoughts before we go into that conflict conversation.

So question one, why do you want to have the conversation? Question two, what do you want to get out of it? I know that when I'm in the super heat of anger I, like most people probably, want to blame the other person. So not trying to have a conflict conversation from that headspace is important to me. And then thinking about like, what do I really want?

So when I'm super pissed, I might want to blame the other person. But when I zoom out and I'm like, "What do I want for the future of this relationship?" Then coming to that conflict conversation can be really different.

Like what I wanted this morning was to be able to share with Alex when something isn't the way I want it to be. But I want to be able to share that with her in a way where she knows we're on the same side together. And what I wanted was to feel like we were on the same side together. That's what I wanted before I bickered with her.

So remembering that even in the moment when our feelings are hurt, and we're upset at the other person, we might want to kind of fight them. But zooming out to see what do we really want for the relationship? What do we really want for the evening?

I posted this video on my Facebook page recently, it was on my personal Facebook page. Basically, it was this guy who teaches people how to do self-defense in public. And he was saying that the number one thing to do is actually to deescalate the situation. Because if someone comes at you and you hit them, and they fall down and hit their head on a rock and die, you can go to prison.

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I don't know the legal blah, blah, blah about that. But the idea is, before we even fight them, before we even gain the physical mastery to be able to fight them, the first step to try is de-escalation. And I think that's also true in relationships.

So I saw the post from my coach, Maggie, as in that's what she was saying. But the other thing that I wanted to add is thinking about what you actually want to have happen. Because if someone comes at you in a bar, which is like what he's talking about in the video, and they're like, "You got a problem?" I think there's a thing in us that wants to be like, "Yeah, I got – Fuck you."

When we perceive that someone's coming at us, we want to come at them. And the reason for that, I think, is actually that we have mirror neurons. So if we're not aware of the mirror neurons, we want to just match whatever we perceive the other person is doing.

But when we can think about like, "What do I actually want to have happen here?" That can help us step out of the mirror neurons and step out of the dance that we perceive the other person's doing.

So to bring this back to like the conflict conversations, sometimes someone might say something to you that you're like, "They're trying to fight me." And you might feel that mirror neuron impulse to try to fight them back.

But if you can think about like, "Wait, what do I actually want to have happen here?" You might be like, "Well, what I actually want to have happen is for me and this person to agree on how the project is going to move forward, and then just move forward." Like, I don't want to spend 45 minutes having an argument with them.

The mirror neuron in you might want to just because that's what you perceive they're doing. And humans, and I find especially humans in the western culture, have this thing where we're like, "Oh, it's not fair." If someone's coming at us, we're like, we have to come at them because that's what's fair.

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Listen, first of all, the world's not fair. Second of all, fuck fair. Because trying to be fair and match what someone else is doing is often going to put you in positions you don't want to be in. So let's be smarter than fair and let's not just mirror what we see other people doing. And let's decide what we actually want, and then fucking make that happen. That's power. That's real power.

Okay. So why do you want to have the conversation? What do you want to get out of it? And is there a way for the conversation to actually lead to greater connection? Whether that's like a professional intimacy or a personal intimacy.

When I am willing to say the difficult things to Alex about silly stuff, about deeply important stuff, when I learn how to navigate those conversations with her, we can be closer, she knows me better. It's interesting, I always feel more in love with her when we've had a conversation like that. Even though during the conversation I often am like, "I hate this so much."

I know, it's useful and beautiful, but in the middle of it sometimes I'm like, "There's no way we're resolving this. I should have just not said anything." But on the other side, when we finally do resolve it, which honestly always feels like magic – And the things I'm talking about earlier are how you get to that place – I always feel more connected to her. It builds a stronger bond. I think we think of conflict as something that weakens bonds, what if the opposite is true?

Okay, so this has been a meandering conversation of conflict conversations, so let's review. One, a conflict conversation is just a conversation you want to have with someone else where you anticipate that there may be some conflict.

When you start having these conversations, you may realize that sometimes there's actually no conflict. It's just our own fear that there will be that keeps us from saying things. Sometimes there will be though, so prepare for that. And I think build up the courage, cultivate the courage in

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yourself to be able to have those conversations, even if there's some rocky stuff that comes up.

Two, why have them? Why ever the fuck you want. But also dig into it for yourself, what do you actually hope to gain from the conversation? What would you like to have happen? Paint a picture for yourself of what the outcome is that you want to help guide you as you move through the conversation.

Three, the compliment sandwich is an amazing tool because it forces you to think deeply about what you actually can appreciate and what actually is going well. And that's going to help you balance the natural negativity bias that all human brains have.

For the middle of the compliment sandwich, just because you put two compliments on either side doesn't mean you can get wild in the middle. I want you to put the middle part also in as neutral of a way as you can.

So that's about whatever your brain's complaint is, whatever your brain's thing it wants to talk about is, how can you word it in a way where you're pulling the useful content out of it and just sharing that part? Versus like attacking the other person or anything like that.

Okay, most of all, I want you just to consider the idea that conflict can be beneficial. That conflict can bring you closer. That conflict can build better working relationships. When you come at it from that angle, knowing what you want to get out of the conversation and believing that it's possible that you can get that even if there is conflict, then you're setting yourself up for success.

And listen, this is not easy peasy stuff. I've done so much work on this. If you do not want to do this work alone, you do not have to. This is 100% what coaches are for. And if you want to have a quick chat with me about how to use this tool in your own life, go sign up for my consult call. They're totally free. We can hash this out. And if you want to learn more about working with me, I'm happy to share that too.

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All right y'all, have a great day.

Thank you for listening to Love Your Job Before You Leave It. We'll have another episode for you next week. And in the meantime, if you're feeling super fired up, head on over to korilinn.com for more guidance and resources.