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## Context to the conversation

Jen speaks about 4 common conflict habits we gravitate to – Blame (externalize the problem), Shame (internalize the problem), Shut down (refuse to have a conversation), Relentlessly Collaborate (proactively work with the other side). She speaks about how we end up developing one of these styles and what happens when we meet another person or entity that has a different conflict habit.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): So let us talk about the conflict loop, Jen. You actually say that we end up getting into a vicious loop and we struggle to get out of it, can you talk a little bit about what the conflict loop is and of course we will talk at length about how we get out of this but it would be good to talk about the conflict loop first.

Dr. Jennifer Goldman (JG): Sure. When we are stuck in conflict, we have got our conflict habit that interacts with other people's conflict habits and those conflict habits form a pattern of interaction and they tend to get locked in this pattern of interaction. And so if you think about this like a circle, that is just a never-ending circle, it just goes around and around and around, you can imagine yourself stuck on this conflict loop and the question that all of my work today really deals with is, how do we interrupt, put a break in this pattern so that we can have a little space to move and ask ourselves, how can I get off of this conflict loop.

DJ: Hmm. And you talk about common conflict habits and you break them into four, you briefly spoke about one of them but could you sort of lay out the framework here Jen in a way this is sort of the underlying foundation based on which we start realizing where we are coming from and where the other person is coming from? So if you could talk a little bit about the four different approaches to conflict that we end up gravitating towards.

JG: Yes. So there are four conflict habits. One of them is one that I mentioned before which is that some of us in our quest to win a conflict, we might feel competitive and this can be a healthy thing. But when we take it to an extreme and we habitually want to win a conflict, it can get to the point where other people end up experiencing us as blaming them. And so we will kind of go on the attack and blame other people. In contrast, others of us habitually blame ourselves, we may blame and shame ourselves. So again, we may do this with good intentions. So our intention may be to learn from a situation and do better next time. But when we habitually do this, sometimes we end up stewing in our own negative self-talk which does not free us from any kind of conflict whatsoever, it just keeps us stuck in that conflict situation. The third conflict habit is shut-down and that is where we may again well intentionally avoid a conflict situation which can be a helpful way to deal with

conflict when, for example, the issue is not that important to you or the person you are dealing with is not that important to you and so avoidance can be useful. But again, when that is the only way that we know how to deal with conflict and we are avoiding issues that are important or were avoiding people whose relationships are important to us, then it becomes an unhealthy way to deal with conflicts. And what typically happens is that the conflict, you know, we will avoid, avoid, avoid, avoid, the conflict is kind of bubbling slowly, simmering, simmering, simmering and then boom, you know, it explodes at a point when we least expected and then we have to go deal with that and we are not prepared. And then finally, one of the other ones that we talked about before is relentlessly collaborate. And that is where we have been taught often like we were saying before from a young age that the way to deal with conflict is to offer other people options, think about what their interests might be, come up with creative solutions, work with them to come up with those creative solutions. And again, that is a really excellent toolbox and skill set to have. And for so many millennia, people did not have that way of thinking about dealing with conflict and we got into all sorts of messes because we did not have that that skill set. But even that, people can get so tied and committed to using this collaborative skill set that we end up pouring energy, time, resources, money into trying to work things out with someone or a group of people who just are not interested in collaborating or cooperating with us. And so, there is all that, you know, wasted time, money, energy, resources down the drain. And so, there has got to be a better way. So actually there is a free quiz online that people can take if they are interested to find out which one of these four conflict habits is your default. And if you go to [optimaloutcomesbook.com/assessment](http://optimaloutcomesbook.com/assessment), you will find the quiz and you can take it. It is fun and helps people figure it out quickly.

DJ: I am sure and I guess to your point, you know, blaming, shutting down and shaming, have a negative connotation. But as you say, collaboration has a positive connotation in most situations, so it is quite counterintuitive to hear that it could sort of be a limiting factor in us getting to a meaningful place. Could you talk a little bit about maybe what sorts of circumstances lead us to one of these four clusters? I am sure each journey is unique but are there kinds of situations that lead people to eventually gravitate towards one of these four buckets?

JG: Yes, typically these habits are formed based on how we grew up. And not necessarily by our family of origin, although very commonly that is, you know, what we see modelled by our families is often what we pick up about how we are supposed to deal with conflict. So I have often had clients say to me, you know, in my family, we just avoided conflict. It was a very quiet dinner table. There was no conflict but that does not mean that conflict did not exist. You know, what my point to them is, that does not mean conflict did not exist, it just means that people's way of dealing with it was to not deal with it. Similarly, like I was saying before about relentlessly collaborating, you know, I learned as a 20 year old, in my first company that I worked with called Interaction Associates, it was very big on collaboration and taught people how to collaborate with each other and so I think a lot of people learn that when you are in a work environment. But you could certainly learn from a young age how to deal with conflict from things that you learn at school from teachers or from other family members or from religious figures in your life, you know, but we typically pick these things up without realizing that we are picking them up from a pretty young age.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: If I reflect on the insight from Jen, I grew up in a context where the narrative around conflict was often that it was a bad thing. Peace and harmony was something that would be emphasized. It is like the dinner table that Jen speaks about where there is silence on the table but that doesn't mean that the conflict doesn't exist. While my wife grew up in an Armed Forces household where there

was free speech and engaging in a healthy debate and disagreement was a way of life. And I can see how that plays out when we interact.

Like in most things, I guess, having some language around this helps us understand what is going on and hopefully gives a sense of what conflict loop we are getting stuck into and therefore what it might take to come out of it.

For me the biggest challenge has been that when I face conflict, I often gravitate towards a shut-down kind of an approach by default with the implicit assumption that it will reduce conflict and very often I realize that it is counter-productive. You might want to think about what your default preference is and where it comes from? Thank you for listening. For more please visit [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com)

## End of transcription

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### Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Nuggets

- 73.00 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - The Full Conversation
- 73.01 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Understanding the 4 default conflict habits
- 73.02 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Why some conflict patterns are common
- 73.03 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Listening to understand the nuances
- 73.04 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Engaging our senses
- 73.05 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Reactive and a Proactive pause
- 73.06 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Downsides of too much empathy and collaboration

- 73.07 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Role of ideal and shadow values in conflict
- 73.08 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Real meaning of "take a walk"
- 73.09 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Pattern breaking behaviour and Camp David

### **About Deepak Jayaraman**

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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