

Cynthia Pyle Manley

Welcome to Conflict Resolutionary, the FMCs podcast, where we support listeners to have more empowered conversations while in conflict.

My name is Cynthia Pyle-Manley, and I am a learning strategist with the Center for Conflict Resolution

Education with FMCs.

Moira Caruso

And I'm Moira Caruso, a mediator with the Office of National Projects with FMCs.

We are so pleased to be able to host these conversations where we explore innovative ways to harness the creative potential inherent in conflict so that we can be at our best when it matters the most.

Cynthia, who's our guest today?

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

Our guest today Moira is Reginald Jackson or Coach Reggie as he's often called.

As a professional certified coach, credentialed by the International Coaching Federation, Reginald is a member of the Federal Coaching Network and has served as a senior mentor, coach, and trainer for the Federal Internal Coaching Training Program.

His clients are civil servants from various agencies ranging from mid-level managers to senior executives.

And we are so pleased to have Coach Reggie here with us today to talk about how coaching the framework works with individuals who are in conflict.

Thanks for being here, Reggie.

Reginald Jackson

Thanks for having me.

It's my pleasure.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

So to get us started, could you just give us a little bit of a framework of what coaching is and why someone would want such a service as coaching?

Reginald Jackson

Sure.

So what coaching is, it's often a good idea to start up with what coaching isn't.

So coaching isn't therapy, coaching isn't consulting.

And with therapy, we typically look at trauma, past events, and how to heal.

With consulting, there's a problem to be solved, some solution to be reached, and that person is a subject matter expert.

As well, the therapist is the subject matter expert.

But with coaching, that's more of a partnership, it is between typically two people, there's also group coaching, but typically between two people where the client is the subject matter expert because they know themselves and their life.

And so the coach is the subject matter expert in the coaching realm, but not as the person is concerned.

So it's a partnership where an individual works with someone else to help them achieve goals or perhaps aspire to reach a level that they haven't gained at this point.

And what the coach does is offers reflection as a mirror, also provides observations or perhaps even is able to give resources.

And we'll talk more about that when we talk about conflict, to help the client or that individual reach the place they want to go.

And the other thing I'll mention is the word coach itself and its etymology is basically a vehicle that carries you from one place to the other.

So you think of like stage coach or a bus as a coach. So an individual as a coach provides that same guidance on a path to that journey for the individual who is the client, sometimes also called the coachee.

And so that's coaching.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

Beautiful.

Thank you.

Well said.

Moira Caruso

Wow.

Yeah.

I love that metaphor of a vehicle and a pathway.

That's really great.

So you kind of you went there already, Reggie.

Obviously, this is a podcast around conflict.

How often would you say you find yourself coaching around conflict in your practice?

Reginald Jackson

All the time.

All the time.

And so, so because words matter, if we look at conflict in the context of something that is a barrier or creates or presents resistance, that's in essence everything we do and everywhere we are.

And so one of the things that I really stress to my clients, particularly where conflict is concerned and let's say a conflict between someone else or perhaps even conflict within themselves is a conflict is normal.

So it's nothing we should freak out about.

It's nothing we should believe is insurmountable or unachievable to move past the conflict, but to actually understand that conflict is normal.

And so when we're faced with these normal situations, what are some tools?

What are some tips?

What are some ways we can manage and pass through this normal occurrence so that we can feel less stress and then move on with the things in our life?

Moira Caruso

I think Cynthia and I would both agree with you wholeheartedly when you say that conflict is normal.

You saying that, however, makes me wonder if your clients present as if they think differently.

Um, so I guess my question is, what does it look like or what are some ways that conflict presents

in your coaching conversations?

How does it come up?

Reginal Jackson

The conflict usually presents itself as some barrier or some resistance.

And so let's look at what the barrier is.

Let's look at where the resistance lies and what your relationship to that is.

So as a coach, my job is to equip you with ways in which to work through the conflict, which is normal.

So whenever it shows up, again, you don't freak out.

You don't get wrapped around the axle.

I was like, okay, here's this thing that's happened as normal things happen.

So let me logically and systematically walk my way through this process.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

Why do you think conflict presents such a challenge for many of us?

Reginald Jackson

Because it's emotional.

And whenever emotion trumps logic, there's a disconnect.

There's a disconnect from what I would say is reality and I won't get philosophical because reality has its own definition for many people.

But I'll go back to the normal analogy.

In the construct of normal, it's something that we expect.

It's something that happens regularly.

Conflict, even though it happens regularly, often comes up at a time that we don't expect or that we anticipate and that we fabricate what the outcome will be.

And a lot of times that's really where the conflict is because we are anticipating an outcome that has yet to occur and that creates the emotion.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

I just got this image of sort of surrendering or releasing the outcome.

It's like the pathway, loosening this resistance to conflict, right?

Because if we have already an idea of what the outcome will be, we're a little bit closed off to what's possible.

Reginald Jackson

From a neuroscience perspective, if you're familiar with the amygdala hijack, so it's a situation that happens when the primitive brain takes over and as we know, fight or flight, which is now fight, flight or freeze, right?

Like a deer in headlights.

Our prefrontal cortex shuts down.

All executive function, reason, logic, no longer is present.

It's no longer available to us.

The only thing we're focused on is either getting away from alleviating or not even being able to deal with the stress from this place, the conflict.

And so normalizing this, understanding that, oh, here's what's happening, right?

Like I'm freaking out about this thing, whatever it is, usually within about four to six seconds when we become present to that amygdala hijack, we can then bring ourselves back to center and then really focus on what's going on.

Because again, this is a situation where we are anticipating an outcome or fearing an outcome, which then escalates the emotional response.

Moira Caruso

So Reggie, it feels really important to me to point out to our listeners right now that this is a tool, what you're describing.

Simply being present to the emotion and understanding that what we need is simply not available

to us during these four seconds that you're talking about.

And executive function is coming back, but it's not with us just yet.

And if I could take that even further, it sounds like you're also saying that a lot of the difficulty we experience in this moment is from the resistance to the emotion itself and to whatever outcome you've decided is coming down the pike.

Can you say more about that?

Reginald Jackson

Your human response, right?

The whole range of emotions.

And whenever we try to suppress those, that's also when we get in trouble.

So again, going back to normal, it's normal to have those experiences, normal to have that reaction.

And it's also normal to bring yourself to a point where you can actually deal with it.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

So it sounds like awareness is a big piece of it, like just being aware of your response and it might be a default response, right?

It might be a response that isn't your most logical.

Like you said, you don't have access to the prefrontal cortex.

So it may not be the most logical response.

So being aware of that and then shifting, how do you as a coach help your clients make that shift?

Reginald Jackson

Yeah.

So because process is very important to me and understanding the power of process, not just in the government, but in a lot of different spaces, acronyms are great ways to remember or recall information.

And so there's an acronym ACAR, ACAR stands for awareness, choice, action, responsibility.



So one of the things that I work with my clients on is recruiting ACAR in practically any situation.

But since we're talking about conflict and you just mentioned it, A, awareness, what is happening here?

What am I thinking?

What am I feeling?

What am I reacting to?

What am I resisting?

Right?

Creating awareness about what is going on in the moment?

See choice.

Now that I've created this awareness, what is the list of things I can select in response to this conflict?

And so the A action is actually choosing one of those items in the list of choices.

And then R is responsibility.

Take responsibility for my actions.

So I take responsibility on the action I took from the choice I made through the awareness I created.

It's something that you can over time practice and like anything else, you become more proficient

with it.

And so the awareness piece sometimes can take a little longer than you would care for it to.

But again, it's a practice.

And so I'll give you in real time how it can work.

You and I are having a conversation.

Something happens and I go, okay, let me just reflect on that for a moment.

I'm creating awareness.

And in that moment, I can respond defensively, I can ask a question, I can look for understanding

if there was a disconnect.

And so I choose one.

So I'm looking for understanding.

So Cynthia, you just said so and so, and I want to make sure I'm clear on exactly what you mean by that.

And so I'm also taking responsibility not only in my choice, but also in the way I'm presenting in the way I am responding to you.

And that's more in the line of logic and reason than emotion.

And so the moment that I took to say, okay, let me, that's that four to six seconds it's actually happening.

So that's usually how that works in real time.

It's certainly not foolproof.

And I've not had one client yet who says that thing doesn't work.

They're like, it's amazing.

Right?

Because they're committed to the practice.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

I love that offering of shifting and working through the internal dialogue that's going through your head and being conscious and intentional about and taking responsibility about the way that you respond.

Reginald Jackson

Right.

You know, something else that I wanted to mention, you said giving up.

And so there are three things or three ways to communicate that I want to point out.

One is negotiate.

When we negotiate, there's a win win or win lose.

And that's a barrier and that's resistance because there's something you're willing to give up, but at the same time, there's something you're not willing to give up.

And when you're not willing to give up, whatever the thing is, whether it's a principle, you know, whether it's a position, now you're willing to defend it.

Again, adversarial.

The next way we communicate is collaboration.

We're working together.

We may have separate and perhaps even opposing views, but we're more open to having the conversation to reach some level of agreement.

The third way is partnership, like in a coaching relationship, more than likely because you're both in agreement in the partnership, you're already aligned in many ways on many topics.

So that creates the least amount of resistance.

And oftentimes there is no resistance.

You're in lockstep.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

So negotiation, collaboration and partnership.

Yes.

In your experience working with your clients, what's the most difficult thing for people to see clearly when they are maybe in one modality and unable to switch to the next mode of communication?

Reginald Jackson

Yeah.

So if they're in conflict, the partnership is the last thing they're seeing.

Because again, if there's an emotional component, which typically there is, there's the stress, there's the standing your ground.

There's the right wrong.

All of those elements come to the surface and you have this stake in the ground essentially that you have to defend your position.

You use the word intentional earlier.

And that's something else that's very, very important.

Another thing I talk about is alignment and how that comes into practice is aligning your focus with your intention.

And so if your intention is to resolve the conflict, yet you're pointing out where the other party is wrong in whatever wrong is, rhetorical question, are you aligned to your intention?

Reginald Jackson

Chances are, probably not.

Moira Caruso

This tracks so beautifully with something shared in an earlier episode of this podcast

on healthy conflict, which is an indication of how important it is.

So I want to call it out.

Be on the lookout for instances where what you're saying and doing in a difficult conversation is not supporting what you decided you wanted out of the conversation.

We all do this and it takes practice to curb it, but notice it and start to shift back to your intention.

Reginald Jackson

So if I'm saying if, because in some cases, for some people, the choice they've made is this is not possible.

And I want to stress that it's a choice you make when you say this is not possible.

So you've already taken possibility off the table, which means the conflict will remain more often than not, it will fester, become worse, and the horses left the barn, you know,

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

Off the rails.

Reginald Jackson

Yeah, off the rails it's a lost cause.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

I've had the benefit of being mentored by you, Reggie, and coached by you.

And that choice piece is has been really empowering for me.

Awareness of that choice is something that is cultivated over time.

And you become more and more aware of the choices that you're making, the deeper you commit to this practice.

And so I just thought that was a beautiful connection that I see there.

Reginald Jackson

Thank you.

Moira Caruso

Reggie, when someone is embroiled in conflict and perhaps not making the right choices or even knowing that there is a choice to be made, how might they know that it's time to seek a coach.

Reginald Jackson

Another great question.

The first thought is being aware of what's happening.

And also coming to the realization that you perhaps tried everything you know of, or you're at a place where you're at an impasse, sometimes we say you're stuck, overwhelmed in whatever situation you make out of this.

You're at a point or a place in your life where it's difficult to move forward, or you could actually find relief in having some help, guidance, partnership to work past that.

You can look at coaching and athletics.

You can look at coaching in business.

You can look at coaching as in some people will hire a life coach.

In all of those scenarios, there's some area whether you realize it in the moment or not that you desire to improve and can only be done through practice.

And so from a coaching perspective, your coach will offer suggestions or actually have you even look at different ways that you may not have thought of before to practice to move past or beyond the stage where you find yourself at an impasse stuck or overwhelmed.

Moira Caruso

So essentially you've run out of ideas and you think you've tried everything that you can and walking away is not an option.

Moira Caruso

Yeah.

Reginald Jackson

Yeah.

And so walking away, if you see walking away as not an option, it won't be an option.

It's because you've now limited your choices.

Now, in some cases where conflict is concerned, walking away might be an option.

Moira Caruso

Sure.

REginald Jackson

Particularly if it's a toxic environment, an individual who they have no desire to partner or collaborate, much less negotiate.

And so in that fight, flight or freeze, it might be good to just do the flight piece.

And it doesn't mean that you've retreated.

It doesn't mean you've given up.

It means you've chosen something that serves you best in that moment.

Moira Caruso

So let's say someone does decide that they need coaching.

They reach out to a coach.

What types of goals might a client craft for themselves to better manage, handle or show up for conflict?

Reginald Jackson

So that becomes this dialogue where more often than not the first goal or the first thing a client says they want might not be what they want.

It may be what they thought of in the moment, but then after having given it some thought.

And a coach oftentimes will ask questions.

You don't think of yourself.

So that's where that partnership comes in as an outside entity who's not emotionally involved in the situation can be a lot more practical, can also be a lot more logical and afford you the opportunity to step back or zoom out and look at the landscape of what you have before you and actually then devise a plan or craft a goal that actually suits your needs.



And that's where a coach can be so helpful because we ask what's called clarifying question.

So you find yourself in this conflict or you find yourself in conflicts.

What ultimately would you want to happen either in face of the conflict or in opposition to the con?

And then, you know, I'll respectfully challenge you because if you say, well, I just need to get away, got it.

And once you get away, then what?

Or in the process of getting away, what are you giving up?

In the process of getting away, what are you gaining?

Moira Caruso

What have been some ways that you have seen clients and maybe even conflicts transformed through coaching?

Reginald Jackson

The greatest transformation going back to the ways we communicate is to create enough awareness to move to a place where the conflict either dissipates or is completely removed. Oftentimes, it's because the collective view, you've misunderstood one another or you believed you had more differences than you actually do.

The transformation especially takes place with what I would say is the broadest spectrum of when we first started working together, I did not understand this person and I didn't want to be in the same room or on the same call.

And now we have such a great relationship.

I have such respect to this individual, et cetera.

So real transformation takes place when what you initially thought to not be possible becomes possible and it is the reality and it is the norm.

Moira Caruso

Thank you.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

Wow.

I just got this image of infinite possibilities.

Reginald Jackson

Oh yeah.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

Like a doorway opening that you didn't, not only did you not have the key to open that door but you weren't even aware that that door was there.

Reginald Jackson

Yeah.

It was just a wall.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

Yeah.

Before.

Because of the awareness piece, the ACAR.

Yeah.

Reginald Jackson

And you may even be aware from the responsibility, the R of ACAR, you may even create awareness

about your position, your context, how you saw the situation and taking responsibility through the lens of maturity to say, you know what?

I really never gave that person a chance.

You know, I had a preconceived notion about where they came from, what they look like, you know, how they sounded, where they went to school, whatever they came in.

And so that space and that grace in the same way that you ask that of someone as you take on the practice.

You can also extend it, right?

We talk about and we are aware of emotional intelligence.

Being compassionate, being more empathetic.

All of those things are important.

And if I remember correctly, Cynthia, you mentioned this earlier as well, is to actually see that individual as another human who has thoughts, feelings, expressions, motivations, hurts, fears.

And to see that person in some cases as you see yourself as flawed and as beautiful as humans are.

Cynthia Pyle-Manley

It's really beautifully said.

That's a perfect note for us to start to sort of wind down this conversation, I think.

Wow.

And the beauty in other people, the fear, the humanity embracing that humanity in yourself and embracing that humanity in others.

Well, thank you, Reggie so much for taking the time to be with us and share all of your experience and insight.

We really enjoyed having you on the podcast.

If the topics and ideas you heard today resonated with you, be sure to share, like and subscribe to the podcast so you're up to date on the most recent episodes.

If you'd like to connect with us, we'd love to hear from you.

Please reach out by email at [fmcspodcast@fmcs.gov](mailto:fmcspodcast@fmcs.gov).

Until next time.