

Jerry: Welcome, Jennifer. It's great to have you on the show. Thanks for coming on the show.

Jennifer G.: Great to be with you.

Jerry: Uh, so, ou- our, our guest today is uh, Jennifer Goldman-Wetzler, who is a brilliant coach, and uh, a new but dear friend. And you have a new book out, and I'm super stoked um, uh, to talk to you about the book, but more specifically, about the content of the book. And before we get started, can you give us the name of the book?

[00:00:30]

Jennifer G.: It's called '*Optimal Outcomes: Free Yourself from Conflict at Work, at Home, and in Life*'.

Jerry: And I will tell you that, I'm standing here, I've got the uncorrected proof, and I've already used it three times with clients. And I said, "You should read this book when it comes out!" So, I'm super excited to talk to you about it.

Jerry: So let's dive in, and you know, um, I think ... I think one of the most im-challenging aspects of the job that I hold, that we hold, is working with conflict. Uh, conflict in our, our own lives, but conflict you know, within the lives of our clients. And, one of the first questions that occurred to me was, in sort of reading the book, but also really diving deep into your background, it's been so clear to me that understanding and unpacking conflict has been an important part of your life. Um, is that a fair statement?

[00:01:30]

Jennifer G.: Absolutely. Yes! (laughs)

Jerry: Yeah. So, I think I know why, but why has that focus ... Why have you focused so much on conflict? What is there for you?

[00:02:00]

Jennifer G.: Yeah. Well, it can be all traced back, as for so many of us these things are, uh, traceable to how we grew up.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: And so, how I grew up, I grew up across the street, living across the street from my grandparents, who had um, come to New York from Europe, where they fled in the uh, late 1930's uh, because of the Holocaust. Uh, they fled Nazi Europe, and it took them about six years to make it to New York. They had a kind of round about route uh, through Italy and from, from Austria to Italy, and Portugal, and Switzerland, um, and eventually to the Dominican Republic, where they uh, where they stayed for a number of years, where my father was born, and they came um, to New York. And I grew up hearing stories uh, from

[00:02:30]

my grandmother, of those adventures. And when I was a kid, she spoke about them, of these, it sounded very romantic. These beautiful romantic-

[00:03:00]

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... adventures of being on the beaches [inaudible 00:03:02] of Dominican Republic, and my father was born, and they had ... Um, my grandfather um, worked on a banana plantation ... And it was not until I became really, a young adult, that it began to dawn on me that these were not only tales of a romantic adventure, but a story about fleeing for their survival.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: Um, and when that hit me, I began to look back on my life, on their lives, in a completely different way, and look at the effects of, you know, world-wide, global conflict on one family, on me. Um, and as I write about in the book, my grandfather had a lot of pain. He left behind-

[00:03:30]

Jerry: Yeah.

Jennifer G.: ... um, a father and a brother, who he never saw again. When he left, he had two other brothers who uh, ended up in, in um, Australia for the rest of their lives. So, we still have the letters that they wrote back and forth, um, to each other, but they rarely saw each other until you know, they passed away. And so, he had a lot of bottled up grief.

[00:04:00]

Um, as immigrants uh, they didn't have the lu- the, the, the, the luck, or the pleasure, or the ability to, you know, they didn't have, have grief counselors, they didn't have therapists available to them, and so they did the, the best that they could with the experiences that they had. I think my grandfather had a lot of um, grief, and, and fear, um, and sadness inside of him. And that would often come out in anger.

[00:04:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: And so, I have, you know, many memories of being ... uh, they would take care of us after school, my parents both worked full-time, and we would go across the street, and my grandmother would, you know, would take care of us. My grandfather would come home from the factory where he worked, every day after work, and you never kind of knew what was gonna happen. Was he gonna be happy that day? Was he gonna blow up that day? So, learning how to ... manage that, as a child, was not easy. Um-

[00:05:00]

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... of course, you know, it led to conflict in the family between my grandfather and my grandmother, with me and my brother, with my, you know, with other family members, as well. Um, so that was, that was one piece of my experience growing up. And then, on the other side of my family we have my maternal grandmother, Florence, who used to sit between us in the family car, on Sundays, when we would drive from the Bronx to Connecticut, where we would go to visit uh, extended family and-

[00:05:30]

Jerry: To the country!

Jennifer G.: (laughing) That would be (laughs) ... You may have those memories as well!
(laughs)

Jerry: I grew up in Brooklyn, I know the country.

Jennifer G.: Right. (laughing) So, we would go off to the country every Sunday, and Grandma Florence would be in the middle of my brother and me in the back seat, and Mom and Dad in the front, and there'd be screaming every which way, and at some point, Grandma Florence would just stop and say "sha-sha" in this very Yiddish, calm way.

Jerry: Huh.

[00:06:00]

Jennifer G.: And, with that, she would then tell us a story about what we had done that day, as from the perspective of a little, [inaudible 00:06:08] to the most very same things, and suddenly the whole car would just ... and I think it was really her presence. It was not necessarily telling the story, it was not necessarily anything she said, 'cause she didn't really say that much, but it was her presence in the car that led things to settle down relatively quickly. So, see, having both sides of this family, kind of juxtaposed uh, against each other, was how I grew up, and, and-

[00:06:30]

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... led me to naturally be interested in, "How can we work with deep emotions like rage, anger, fear, sadness?" Um, both in ourselves, and also in others.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: And how can we be that presence that my Grandma Florence was for me?

Jerry: Yeah.

Jennifer G.: How can I be that for myself? How can I be that for others?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:07:00]

Jennifer G.: And also, now, how can I teach others how to be that presence for themselves? How can I teach ... when she was the conflict whisperer for us, how can, how can um, we all learn how to be our own conflict whisperers?

Jerry:

[00:07:30]

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, thank you for that. Um ... I'm gonna turn to your book, and read a little bit, um ... and because you do share a little bit about both grandparents, both experiences in the ... um, uh, I understand maternal grandma was Florence, what was, what was uh, your father's father's name?

Jennifer G.:

Hans.

Jerry:

Hans. And what did you call him?

Jennifer G.:

Opa.

Jerry:

Opa.

Jennifer G.:

They were Oma and Opa. Yeah.

Jerry:

Oma and Opa.

Jennifer G.:

Right. 'cause they came from Vienna. So that's German-

Jerry:

Hmm.

Jennifer G.:

... you know, German names for grandmother and grandfather.

[00:08:00]

Jerry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). You know, those who follow the podcast um, and, and my work, know that I get fascinated by the roots of our programming, if you will, the way in which the choices that we make in our lives, which seem to come from subconscious pr- prefrontal cortex place-

Jennifer G.:

[crosstalk 00:08:23] help-

[00:08:30]

Jerry:

... actually link back into the past, and what I heard was, I'll read to you, you s- you, you ... in, in exploring the question of 'Why conflict?' And you, you, you speak about, "I was intrigued by how emotions such as anger and sadness contribute to conflict, I had grown up in a family of screamers and door slammers, of which, my grandfather was the most extreme example." And I remember reading that and thinking back to my own experience of violence in the household. And that's the word, that door slamming. It's uh, uh ... I often think that the body experiences the potential of violence, almost as much as it experiences actual violence.

[00:09:00]

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And yelling? Has the potential of violence.

Jennifer G.: Yep.

Jerry: And so, then you wrote, "And that's when it struck me, he had fled Vienna in 1938, in anticipation of the Nazi avenger- invasion. And he had eventually landed in New York, where he, he had rebuilt his life. Today," and I was really struck by this line, "Today, I can just barely comprehend the pain he endured. The grief and guilt of leaving people behind- he loved, behind forever."
[00:09:30]

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Y- you know, um, in my experience, I think in that little section, I think you do something really important, which is that you're drawing a connection between the outward experience of, of someone's suffering, which in this case, was anger, sadness, potential violence, yelling, screaming, all of the attributes that we, that we connect with conflict, and his inner suffering. Um-
[00:10:00]

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... my dear friend, and oft quoted teacher, Parker Palmer, likes to say that, "Violence is what we do when we don't know what to do with our suffering."
[00:10:30]

Jennifer G.: Hmm. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And then, in, in getting you to recount your story, I was struck by something that you said, and you said, "And so, naturally," naturally you wanted to intellectually understand it.

Jennifer G.: Yeah.

Jerry: I, I, I'm gonna challenge you, you on that. I don't know that it's naturally. I think, in my experience, the more typical responses that I have seen are, 1) to emulate the behavior, and take it on as one's own.
[00:11:00]

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And the other is to avoid like hell, any potential conflict.

Jennifer G.: Hmm. Hmm.

Jerry: I don't know if, does this resonate with you?

Jennifer G.: [00:11:30] Well, absolutely, it does. And I see that so- and we see that in the world at large, so if you look at international conflicts, um, you know, we see that nations commit, often against their own uh-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... citizens, what has been committed against them. And we see that in, in ... at every level of society. So it goes from international all the way down to in marriages, just between two people, um, and in families. And in teams...

Jerry: ... between mothers and daughters, eh?

Jennifer G.: (laughing)

Jerry: Referencing a little story Jennifer tells, in her book.

[00:12:00]

Jennifer G.: Right, absolutely. So you're absolutely right that, very often, we perpetuate um, what has been done to us, if we're not uh, able to be thoughtful about it.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: I think the fact that I, you might even say in, you know, in my growing up, I, my experience on the one side of my family was mediated (laughs) by the experience on the other side of the family. So having that calm presence of my maternal grandmother, Florence, was not-

Jerry: Right.

[00:12:30]

Jennifer G.: ... you know, that was no joke. That was real.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: And it, it's quite possible, had she not been who she was, that I might then have continued along, just like you're talking about, where I would have just kind of gone thinking, here unable to stop myself, um, perpetuated the same kinds of situations that were handed down to me, on to others. Action, n- no, reaction number 1.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:13:00]

Jennifer G.: Thought number 2 is um, I'd be lying if I told you, and I, and I'm kind of frank about this in, in my writing, as well, I'd be lying if I told you that it, that it hasn't come through me.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: I think one of the reasons why it ha- it has been an intellectual path, for me, is because um, I had ... have, had, even as a kid, had no interest in perpetuating what I experienced. Um, and it is so incredibly hard, as you know, to um, not do that, to not perpetuate what has been perpetuated against you.

[00:13:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: So, uh, you know, if you ask me, "Well, why did you then go the intellectual route?" Maybe one y- you know, could argue that in my family um, education was paramount-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... and so, it was, it was obvious to me that if I wanted to understand how to not do-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... what other had done to them, and what others-

Jerry: Yeah.

[00:14:00]

Jennifer G.: ... had done to me, then I had you know, the, the most obvious way was to go figure it out intellectually.

Jerry: Hmm. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: Um, but you know, one thing that's actually interesting on that is, I was very clear immed- you know, immediately upon graduating from college, that I wanted to go learn and, and work-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, which I did, it took me a couple of years and I got there. Um, and I did learn intellectually, what you know, the, the, it, at that time and place, what the hatin- you know, what the, the zeitgeist was. And it took being there for just a few years, about 5 years, for me to realize, "Hey, I think there's more to it than just the intellectual side."

[00:14:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: That if we take people who are incredibly emotionally hooked, and give them this formula, and say-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.:
[00:15:00] ... "Go find yourself a win/win solution by being level headed and clear headed." That it doesn't fly. I knew it didn't fly in my own family, I knew it didn't work in the Middle East sometimes, I knew it did uh, sometimes but not others. I became really curious about, well, why is that? You know? Why does it work sometimes, and, and what circumstances does it not work?

Jerry: It, it what uh, what occurs to me, I really relate to what you're saying, because I often speak about the fact that, inside of me, I feel like I, I make reference a lot of times to Marvel Superheroes, so everybody forgive me, I'm a little boy when it comes to that.

[00:15:30] Um, but I often make reference to 'The Hulk', who lives inside of me. And um, I remember as a kid, really coming into relationship with that, because I would often feel, after The Hulk would show up, and I would rage.

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry:
[00:16:00] As part of the conflicts that I was experiencing, I would feel tremendous amount of shame. Um, and it really took um, an adult move, a movement in my adulthood, to understand that, for me, The Hulk, and perhaps for you, The Hulk part of Hans, needed to be understood, and welcomed, emotionally and not merely intellectually. Because the intellectual understanding makes sense, of course, of course this is a response-

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:16:30] Jerry: ... but there was that little moment of empathy that I saw, in that little section in which you said, "I can only imagine what the guilt and grief was like."

Jennifer G.: Right.

Jerry: Right? And that's ... that's felt a very adult response to the, to the threat of Hans. The way he might exhibit his pain, and the way you might have learned to exhibit the same pain.

Jennifer G.: Yeah.

Jerry:
[00:17:00] And, to turn that, that experience into something really quite profound and sacred, which is to ease the suffering of others ... you know, w- before we started, I asked you about some, some things on your wall, and what occurs to me is above your head, behind you, is the Hebrew uh, saying for 'peace', and that's not an accident, is it?

Jennifer G.: (laughing) No, it's there to remind me, every day, that that's, that's, you know, it's one of my values. It's, it's the, one of the strongest values that I hold. And we need to remind ourselves of these things, uh, sometimes. I will also say you know, I, I teach this work in workshop settings-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... and I've done that for 10 years. Um, and s- there's so many moments in these workshops where you see, and I know you've experienced these in the workshops, in the work you do with clients as well, you see a light bulb go off for someone, their entire body changes, their voice changes, um, and it's just this, this transformative moment. And so often, I think, those transformative moments occur. And my hope is that, when people read this book, those transformative moments will occur for them, just in the reading of the book, as well. Those transformative moments occur when people are able to do what you just described.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: Able to put yourself, really, truly ... I mean, I know it's kind of a platitude when we say, "Put yourself in someone else's shoes," but to really, truly put yourself in that other person's shoes, just for a moment. Doesn't need to last forever, you don't need to do it for the rest of your life, but just for a moment-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... and really ask yourself, "What in the world would lead this person, given everything they've done in their life, given all the background and experience that I know about that person, what would lead them to behave the way that they are?"

Jerry: Right.

[00:19:00]

Jennifer G.: If I [crosstalk 00:18:58] their grieving, or I say they're angry, or I say they're hurting me? Why would they do that? And, when we ask that kind of question, as you know, we get to that adult place that you're talking about. And often, you know, it happens in the, in a snap. Just in the blink of an eye. It's-

Jerry: Yeah.

Jennifer G.: [crosstalk 00:19:17] ... it's not hard, but we need to make the space to ask that question.

[00:19:30]

Jerry: Yeah. It's, it's um ... it, it, it takes an important movement, um, where you no longer see that other person as um, you know, in my book, I, I refer to it as 'the

[00:20:00] rational other', because everybody else is always irrational. But to begin to imagine your way in, using your, your own experience as empathetic guide, to imagine your way into that space. You know, when, when I work with a client, I, I might joke um, "Okay, I understand that you think that they're being, the other person is being a sociopath, but the truth is the number of sociopaths is actually pretty low."

Jennifer G.: (laughs)

Jerry: In fact, there's usually a rationale-

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... for every stance that someone is taking. And that um, one way that might be useful is to, is to start to imagine the rationale, the needs, that they might be trying to meet, by doing this behavior that you find so conflictual, so awful.
[00:20:30]

Jennifer G.: Right.

Jerry: And to, to, to, to s- ... In your experience, does that, does that jive with, with the stance that you're talking about taking?

Jennifer G.: Yes, absolutely. I also talk often about the fundamental attribution bias-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... which basically says that we attribute our own behavior to circumstances. So, "I was late because there was traffic."

[00:21:00]
Jerry: Right. (laughs)

Jennifer G.: [crosstalk 00:21:01] ... because I'm disrespectful of you, it's because there was traffic that was out of my control. And we attribute other people's behavior, to their personality. [crosstalk 00:21:10]

Jerry: Right! (laughs) They're so disorganized!

Jennifer G.: (laughing)

Jerry: They can't get their act together, right?

Jennifer G.: This is a very well established psychological principle. Um, and it is unbelievable, even when we know that this fundamental attribution bias exists, we still uh, fall victim to it, we fall prey to it. Um, and I think there's an absolute piece of that that helps describe what you're talking about. Which is, it's just too easy for us, especially when our amygdala is hijacked, we're you
[00:21:30]

know, not uh, using the full capacity of our brains, we're in that lizard-brain mode, all of the cylinders are gonna you know, point, everything's pointing in the direction of, "We are not gonna let that other person off the hook."

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:22:00]

Jennifer G.: So, the ability to have, as practiced, to step back um, and, and notice what we're doing, notice what's happening, that we are, you know, pointing a finger at someone else for something, is first of all, incredibly helpful. Um, and in the book I called 'em practices, I called these things practices because that is what they are, and you and I you know, know full well from our Buddhist practice training, but anyone listening who has a yoga practice, or any meditation practice, or a practice of going to the gym, uh, or a practice, practicing an instrument, these are all various, different kinds of practices, and we know from doing those practices, that ... doing them over time helps you get better at them.

[00:22:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: And so, having a practice of noticing what's happening in the moment, asking yourself, "What else could be possibly responsible for why that person's acting the way that they are? What in their background, in their history, might explain their behavior?" Can be incredibly helpful.

[00:23:00]

Jerry: Huh, that, that's super helpful. And, and you mention the book, and the practices in the book. Let, let's jump into that for a little bit. What is an optimal outcome?

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). An optimal outcome is one that, not only takes into account what your deepest wishes are in any given situation, 'cause we really do want you to wish big, and really ask yourself, in an ideal situation, "What would I like to happen here?" Um, but it also takes into account, what is the reality of the situation that I am facing?

[00:23:30]

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: Because if you think about this as a um, a graph-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... and you got a, you know, one axis, the, the, the Y-axis going up to the sky is, "What do I want to have happen in an ideal situation?" And then the X-axis, the horizontal axis, is um, "What is the reality that I, what are the constraints that I'm facing? What's the reality that I'm facing? What are the people, the reality about the people, and their personalities, their roles-

[00:24:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: "... if you're in a, in a, either team, or family, or any other context?" Um, so, you ... an optimal outcome is one that, that maximizes both of these uh, axes, both of these ideas. So, it's not an optimal outcome if it's the best thing that you can possibly imagine, but it ain't ever gonna fly (laughs) because it's not gonna. The reality of the people-

[00:24:30]

Jerry: But, but, but why is the optimal outcome not me winning?

Jennifer G.: (laughing) Right?

Jerry: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: It's often so. So, the reality is, an optimal outcome um, is often not what you expect, or not what you necessarily wish would happen-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... but what can happen-

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:25:00]

Jennifer G.: ... given the reality of the situation. And I wanna be clear, I'm not suggesting that people should be resigned, and-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... and just cynical, and, and resigned to, "Well, whatever I want is never gonna happen, so why even try? And these people are so horrible-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: "... I, you know, there's nothing I can do about this!" No. That is not at all what we're talking about. Um, what we're talking about is, being honest and clear with yourself. And I love the fact that Ray Dalio, um-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:25:30]

Jennifer G.: ... who, who wrote this amazingly great book um, called, 'Principles: Life and Work' who is the you know, iconic hedge-fund founder? He talks a- a- you know, I can say this as a psychologist, but when, (laughs) when hedge-fund founder says you need to take reality into account in order to maximize your output, um, you know, it's the same exact idea. It's the same exact idea. You know, if you want to have an optimal outcome, you need to take reality into

[00:26:00] account. And that doesn't mean um, resigning yourself to it, it means accepting what the reality is, and really looking carefully and closely at what that reality is. [crosstalk 00:26:04]

Jerry: It, it reminds me of a zen aphorism that I bastardized years ago, which is, "This being so, so what?"

Jennifer G.: Right.

Jerry: Meaning, "This is the situation-"

Jennifer G.: Right.

Jerry: ... clear sighted, no delusion, no tipping over into you know, kind of pathological pessimism, or you know, unrealistic optimism. "This being so-

Jennifer G.: Right.

[00:26:30]

Jerry: "... now what will you do about it?" And what is the, what is the, the movement towards? Um, you know, if we can, if we can make it more specific, you have two co-founders in conflict-

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... neither party's gonna leave. What are you gonna do about it?

Jennifer G.: Right.

Jerry: Right? That's a reality that you have to work with. And you may not love each other, but you can work past the conflicts that have sort of held you back. Am I seeing that correctly?

[00:27:00]

Jennifer G.: Yes. Absolutely. So, so often, you know, this work that I do is most relevant to people where [inaudible 00:27:13] ... way, doesn't seem like a viable option.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: If it were, you could do it and free yourself of conflict quite easily.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: But the reason why people sta- ... o- one very obvious reason why people stay stuck in conflict, is because it is so, or it can seem so incredibly difficult to walk away. So the example that you just gave, of two co-founders, that neither one of them is going anywhere. And so, how are they gonna work together? How are they gonna work things out when they can't stand each other at this point?

[00:27:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: [00:28:00] This, these practices help in that situation, 'cause it uh, one of the practices helps you really think clearly and carefully about, "Well, what would be the cost that I would pay if I walk away."

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: What would be the cost if he or she walked away? Uh, what are the costs that I'm paying by staying?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: Staying in conflict? I mean, people can stay in conflict for years, and-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... they're paying costs, that entire time. And often the costs just keep getting worse, and worse, and worse.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: [00:28:30] But they seem, those costs can often seem, better than the cost of walking away. When, if we would sit down and actually ask ourselves to compare the cost if we would walk away, versus the cost of staying put, we might-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: [00:29:00] ... we might see, from a more rational lens, actually, that, that perhaps, walking away [inaudible 00:28:42] would benefit us more, and, and pay fewer costs. But, if we do that analysis and we see that staying put is gonna have fewer costs associated with it, then the question is, "What reality do I need to come face-to-face with about who this other person is, about who I am, about what the-"

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: "[crosstalk 00:29:05] ... is all about, and what do I need to, maybe, accept?"

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: This isn't gonna, th- this piece is not gonna change, so what else can I do?

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: It also a matter of asking the right kinds of questions, so the other day a client said to me, "Well, why can't she just blah, blah, blah ..."

Jerry: (laughing)

Jennifer G.: When-

[00:29:30]

Jerry: I've had those conversations. (laughing)

Jennifer G.: Right. Incredibly common. And I, you know, I talk about empathy, I have so much empathy for her-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... because, she just wanted this other person to change so badly, "Why can't she just, bleh?"

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: And I said, "You know, we could ask that why question, 'Why can't, why didn't-'"

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: "... 'Why haven't they?' til we're blue in the face, nothing will ever change. [00:30:00] What if we switched that question into a, 'How can I?'" ... [inaudible 00:30:00] not consist of uh, ultimately simple, simple shift, but uh, "'How can I? What can I do?' In the face of that. So this other person is the way that they are, 'Well, what can I do?'"

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I- It reminds me uh, one of your uh, one of the folks that you quote is the brilliant, wonderful, loving Sylvia Boorstein, who is uh, a [00:30:30] brilliant uh, Buddhist teacher, and you quote, "Even if it were ever possible to know the answer to the question 'Who started this fight?' It would not solve the problem of needing to know, 'What should we do now?'"

Jennifer G.: Right, right. And that, I, I, that quote, um, heads the um, chapter on 'Imagine Your Ideal Future.'

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: And that is because, a couple of things. One is, it is so incredibly common. [00:31:00] There's something, I don't know this uh, this would be a fascinating thing to do some research on-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... understand why do we find so much pleasure, in a way, almost, in looking back, and pointing our fingers, and blaming one another.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: Blaming ourselves, blaming each other.

Jerry: Yeah.

Jennifer G.: So, I mean, I don't use that word pleasure lightly, I think that we often-

Jerry: I, I see what you mean-

Jennifer G.: [crosstalk 00:31:22]

Jerry: It's almost addictive in trying to find-

Jennifer G.: Right?

Jerry: ... the fault.

Jennifer G.: Right. Right.

Jerry: Yeah.

[00:31:30]

Jennifer G.: And I hear from my clients all the time, that are wanting to go there, and, and sometimes you know, we need to stay there as a, as a, as a, I suppose as an advisor-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... you need to be with them, listen to, to that, to some degree. And, um, just like that why question, it's often not productive. What is more productive is to turn our attention to, "Okay, uh, you know, where are we now? How can I observe where I am today? And where do I wanna go in the future?" But, the classic win/win negotiation methodology of-

[00:32:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... you know, tell me what your interests are, I'll tell you what my interests are, and together we'll work it out and we'll come up with some options that meet your interest and my interest, and we'll, we'll have, we'll have some kind of agreement, so often doesn't work, because when we're stuck in conflicts that are emotionally driven-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:32:30]

Jennifer G.: ... we can't easily walk away, where the costs would be so high that it's not gonna be easy for us to walk away when, when val- when, when the values that we hold are driving conflict, that are deeply held. Um, when those things are present, rational solutions just aren't gonna cut it.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: That is what I have seen over 20 years of work and research. And so, um, the question is: Well, what do we do then? 'Cause-

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:33:00]

Jennifer G.: ... if the rational ideas, and the win/win solutions were gonna work, they probably would have worked a long time ago! But they haven't!

Jerry: (laughing)

Jennifer G.: So, my advice is, put the brain, just like you might've been suggesting to me earlier-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... put the intellect aside for a moment, and activate the imagination.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: Activate your imaginative mind.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: And, and ask yourself, in an ideal future, putting aside-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... what I said before about taking reality into account for a moment, in an ideal future, what would I like to see happen then? What would I like to hear happening then?"

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: "What would I feel like then? What would my emotions be like then? Um, what would even be tasting that? So maybe I'm, you know-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... having a-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... a loving and lovely dinner with a client, or a spouse-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... or a, a co-founder, and we're experiencing this beautiful meal, so you know, "How can I activate my imagination?" Um, and Martin Luther King does such a beautiful job of this in his 'I Have a Dream' speech, it's just so ... We often pay attention to that speech because he, you- you know, people say, well, he says, "I have a dream, I have a dream," over and over again, it's the kind of repetitive oratory-

[00:34:00]

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... that we know is, is so powerful about his speech. But one of the things that we overlook, often, is that he really draws our attention to those um, very tactile-

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:34:30]

Jennifer G.: ... sensory, imaginative uh, visions of his, of the future.

[00:35:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). I, I, it's a, it's a brilliant assertion, and I remember that section in the book where you talk about the use of the sensory experience to sort of fire off the imagination. I have a theory on your question, the one you, you said, you know, why do we focus so much on the blame?

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And I think it's a defense mechanism against the shame that we might feel, ourselves.

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:35:30]

Jerry: You know, if I, I think back, and I feel into my own body, I, I can still feel shame associated with 'The Hulk'. And so, rather than fin- wanting to be responsible

for the conflict that's there, I seek to find fault, I seek to find someone to blame, so that it's not me.

Jennifer G.: Right.

[00:36:00]

Jerry: And um, one of the uh, adulting moves, that I have come to understand is, it is possible for you to be correct, and for me to be correct.

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Right? It's possible for you to have a truth, and for me to have a truth. It is possible for there to be um, conflict without blame and without shame.

Jennifer G.: Yes.

Jerry: And-

Jennifer G.: Absolutely.

[00:36:30]

Jerry: Uh, that was freeing for me to understand that stance.

Jennifer G.: Yeah.

Jerry: Does this resonate with your experience?

Jennifer G.: Yeah. Absolutely. I think that's a great insight that you have, that it's, it almost reminds me of, of, kind of a classic politician who might draw our attention away from the thing they don't want us to focus on, by you know, th-
[crosstalk 00:36:49]

Jerry: That's right.

Jennifer G.: Other subversion happens, so that we can all be looking at that instead of the thing that they're embarrassed by. I think that's really what you're describing.

[00:37:00] And absolutely, I had not um, thought about it in that way, but it's very plausible-

Jerry: Yeah.

Jennifer G.: ... that the reason why we blame other people, is so that we don't have to come face-to-face with the reality of who we may be, that we may be incredibly ashamed-

Jerry: And, and, and ... it doesn't even have to be reality, that it's quote "Our fault" it's just a sense that we are ashamed of our behavior.

Jennifer G.: Right.

[00:37:30]

Jerry: That may feed the need to find fault with other people. And so, it's a kind of deflection-

Jennifer G.: Right.

Jerry: Against an, a, a, a very uncomfortable, negative, probably very, very old, preverbal even, feelings of "It's my responsibility."

Jennifer G.: Right. Right. I think also, once we get into that, you know, o- one of the things that hit, that really has struck me so powerfully, and, in in doing this work is, the habits that we get in.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:38:00]

Jennifer G.: So, once we start goin' down that path, it just becomes easier and easier to do whatever-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: ... it is that we are doing. So, if we're blaming other people, we'll just keep blaming other people. And it's uh, such a self-reinforcing mechanism.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: Um, that you know, if I had to kind of, in some ways, if I had to sum up all of this work, it would be to say, "The work is about breaking that habit."

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:38:30]

Jennifer G.: It's too easy to stay stuck in that habit of, "I blame them." And then they do whatever they do, whether they blame you back, or they've shut down, or they blame themselves. Um, so the work is, "How do you build a practice where you can observe yourself doing that thing, doing that-"

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: "... habit, doing that blaming of the other person, and then what would it look like to, to interrupt that habit?"

[00:39:00]

Jerry:

Yeah. And I think, I think that that interruption is, that's the opportunity to form a new, what I would argue, is an adulting habit.

Jennifer G.: Yeah.

Jerry: It's an, it's an, it ... and it's separate from, "Oh, it's not all your fault, therefore it's all my fault."

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: 'Cause that movement keeps the conflict alive-

Jennifer G.: Right.

Jerry: ... but it's a different movement, it's a movement towards, "Wait a minute, let me look at this from a completely different angle, and see conflict in a different way."

Jennifer G.: [00:39:30] Exactly. So, in the book I describe, as you know, the four conflict habits that are very common, that we often get stuck in. And I say all of us have, what I call, a primary conflict habit. And, so out of the those four, there is one of them that um, that we fall back on most easily as a, as our default. And, we all use all four of them under different circumstances. So the four being, we blame other people, we shame and blame ourselves-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: [00:40:00] ... which is what you're talking about, um, we avoid or shut down in the face of conflict with other people, um, and then we also kind of counterintuitively, we relentlessly seek to collaborate with other people, even when they refuse to cooperate with us.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: We see this most clearly in the start-up world, that you and I both-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: [crosstalk 00:40:14] ... so well, and love so well. Um, where you know, collaboration is where it's at, and if you're not collaborating, you're not w-working cross [inaudible 00:40:22] nobody supports, there's something wrong with you!

[00:40:30] Um, so, people who have been trained or grown up in this world where collaboration is touted as you know, the highest achievements, um, we, we can actually get into a habit of relentlessly doing that.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: [crosstalk 00:40:39] ... where it becomes our limitation, it gets in our way, it stops us from being able to move forward, break through conflict, um, and achieve our goals. So each one of those four uh, habits, when they're taken to the extreme, and when we do them habitually, they can, they can become our limitation. So that's what ... I would never say to somebody, "Oh, great way to break your conflict habit of blaming others, would be to blame yourself." No. Absolutely not.

[00:41:00]

Jerry: (laughs)

Jennifer G.: The trick- the tricky part is, is that with the way to break a conflict pattern, is that we don't ... it, it, it's idiosyncratic for each situation.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: Where there's an ... I can't give you the one silver bullet where I say, "Well, if you typically have a pattern of, a, a habit of, blaming other people, then just do X, Y, Z."

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:41:30]

Jennifer G.: Um, so it, it is a, it is a bit up to you to figure out, what would it look like for you to do something different? Although I will, I will qualify that by saying, if you're in a habit of doing one thing, I have also been known to say, it almost doesn't matter what else you do, as long as it's something different than you've done before. (laughs) So-

Jerry: (laughing)

Jennifer G.: [crosstalk 00:41:51] not, not terrible if you've been blaming the other person to kind of have a wake up call of, "Hmm, how am I responsible here?" Right? [00:42:00] Maybe I'd shift it to not, "How am I to blame?" But, you know, "What responsibility can I take?" Or, "What contribution-"

Jerry: Yeah.

Jennifer G.: "... can I own here, that I, you know, how have I contributed to this [inaudible 00:42:08]"

Jerry: Yeah, I mi-, I might joke with something like, "So, how's that workin' for ya?"

Jennifer G.: Right.

Jerry: You know? But ... So, I wanna, I, I wanna start uh, start to wrap us, but um, one of my favorite quotes on conflict comes from Bhuddhist psychotherapist, David Richo. And this is from his book um, 'How to be an Adult in Relationship' and he says, "To be adult in relationship, is not to be conflict free, but to resolve conflicts mindfully." And I think that's what you're talkin' about here, isn't it?

[00:42:30]

(silence)

I mean, there is a part of the book where you talk about the value of conflict.

[00:43:00]

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, I think it's just a matter of terminology.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: So I, absolutely agree with what you just said, and with his points. And the language that I'm using is slightly different, a kind of inverted language. Because-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... when we use the language of 'resolve conflict' even if we're saying, "Let's mindfully resolve conflict," what that says to me is that, we think there is some way that we can, kind of, wrestle it to the ground, sometimes.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:43:30]

Jennifer G.: I think it's, you know, 40 years ago when the concept was totally new, of this idea that we could resolve conflict in a you know, way that left everyone winning, or everyone feeling-

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: ... like they had gotten what they needed or wanted, I would have agreed with, "Yes. You know, we wanna mindfully resolve." But what I've learned, and what the research shows, is that some conflicts will never be resolved. Right?

Jerry: Oof.

[00:44:00]

Jennifer G.: Think of the Middle East conflicts, or even conflict in our own homes, or marriages, or teams, with co-founders, you know, you're not gonna resolve every issue. And I think it's a fallacy to tell ourselves that we are. And there can just be some lightness when we realize the goal is not necessarily to resolve every issue. If you're locked in the deep values driven, emotionally hooking

[00:44:30] situation, unlikely that suddenly there's gonna be you know, rainbows and unicorns, um, where you've resolved everything.

What's much more likely is that you can learn how to, by using these practices that we're talking about, can learn how to unhook yourself from that pattern, break free from the pattern that you're locked in with someone else. 'Cause, you know, your habit locked in a pattern with their habit, and it gets, it gets to be intransitive. It's, it's, it's locked. So the work is to learn how to free ourselves from those cycles. And once we do, it's almost like the conflict could even, you could imagine, like, there's still a circle going on there, we're just not in it anymore. (laughs)

Jerry: Right.

Jennifer G.: We have [crosstalk 00:45:17]

Jerry: I love that.

Jennifer G.: ... that dynamic. And guess what, by the way, when we free ourselves, we naturally free whoever else is involved, too. 'Cause if we're not in it, they're in it by themselves, (laughs) right?

[00:45:30]

Jerry: Right.

Jennifer G.: Kind of impossible to be stuck in a conflict by yourself. You naturally are freeing ... that's the beauty of this is that, when you free yourself, you naturally free other people as well. That kind of means is that you could kind of observe it, watching it from a distance and it, it might still do it's thing, but you're not in it anymore.

Jerry: That is brilliant. That is so helpful, um, thank you for making the distinction, and you know, I just bodily felt a lightness as you made, made that even more clear for me. That it's really about unhooking ourselves from the shenpa, to use the, the Buddhist terminology, from the, from the Tibetan Buddhist terminology, of unhooking ourselves from that, that experience of being locked into it.

[00:46:00]

Jennifer G.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Um, and I love the notion of really ... I th- I think what David is, is reaching for, is the mindful aspect of it? But I think that you've expanded the definition of, what does it really mean to resolve? It may mean that the conflict exists, but I am not hooked anymore. And I suspect that's what you mean, perhaps, by conflict freedom.

[00:46:30]

Jennifer G.: Yes. You got it.

Jerry: Yeah.

Jennifer G.: Exactly right.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: Exactly right. When we're free, it, it holds no meaning-

Jerry: Yeah.

Jennifer G.: [00:47:00] ... there's no energy there. It just kind of dissolves, and that, that's what I was talking about before also, about these aha moments, that you see these people, you know, in a moment, could just see a flash, and they're never the same person again, ever.

Jerry: Hmm.

Jennifer G.: You have that insight.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennifer G.: Like, you know, you might fall-back and then you go forward, but that insight stays with you.

Jerry: [00:47:30] Well, I wanna thank you for coming on the show, Jennifer. And I'm, again, I wanna thank you for writing this book. Um, it's an important book, uh, it's a useful book, um, I will be using it in the work I do with clients, and I will be recommending it to folks, um, as well. And I, you know, um, I think this is an important work and um, I, I just wanna congratulate you on putting it out there. So, thank you.

Jennifer G.: Thank you so much, Jerry. Such a pleasure to be with you.

Jerry: You too. You too.