Navigating Team Conflict: Essential Leadership Techniques for Harmony

Discover expert strategies to handle common conflicts in the workplace. Guest Lloyd Thompson draws on his experience to provide insights on the topic.

James Schramko and Lloyd Thompson

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 1021. And I'm chatting with Lloyd Thompson from VirtualDOO.com, an expert in teams and systems. Great to have you here, Lloyd, thank you for joining.

Lloyd: Thanks for having me, James.

James: Today's topic, we're going to be having a chat about navigating team conflict and what we can do to create harmony. If you have a team, you're going to have conflict, right?

Lloyd: Yeah, for sure. I mean, I had a great, great stat the other day, and it came out of - from 2021, there was a study found, and it said that the average US employee spends 2.8 hours per week dealing with conflict. And that equates to $360 billion a year in paid effort. Isn't that shocking?

James: It's just like that one about when someone leaves a company, a bad hire, it costs the company an absolute fortune. We've talked about recruitment on a couple of occasions before, but I think this is a meaty topic. Thinking about this, before we spoke, I was remembering my time and career, you know, from my first jobs through, and there was many a conflict. And it's some really difficult stuff. It's like, emotionally taxing, to have to deal with it.

But I guess, I always put it down to the fact that we're dealing with humans. And not many people have operating systems for humans. Parents have trouble with kids, leaders or managers, depending on sort of what level of leadership they are, like very basic ones are probably still just managing, they generally don't get well trained or given resources.

So I'd love to just sort of have a discussion, we'll talk about when we're mentioning the word conflict, or conflict within a team. Let's give some context to that. What do you think conflict actually represents?

What constitutes a conflict?

Lloyd: Yeah, so we're talking about workplace conflict, primarily. And there's different types, there's personal conflict as well, but workplace conflict. And just to give you a bit of an example, I remember working with this e-commerce company, and the first thing you notice when you - most conflict is well-intentioned.

So I was working with this e-commerce company, they've got new product launches coming out all the time. And they've got developers who want to focus on technical robustness. And they've got designers who want to focus on user experience, and they've got marketers who want to focus on getting the new features in.

But as that deadline approaches, suddenly, the temperature gets turned up. And there's only so much that's going to fit in that new product by time. And you can see sort of things are starting to simmer. And you can't have everything, you have to prioritize. And so that's one place where I've seen conflict quite a lot, because everyone wants their piece in there.

And so what happens is, productivity actually drops as this conflict starts to take place, and morale starts to drop. And if you don't step in, this really affects the culture of the team as well. And it can lead to delays, it can affect the product launch, which ultimately, can impact your revenue of your business. So it's something you can't just let simmer, because the consequences are significant.

So when I've seen this before, this is an example of where your leader, your Director of Operations, in this case, we stepped in, and we just listened to what's going on. And that's probably the most important tip I've got here, is just listening to everyone's side and understand what's really going on. And arbitrating and prioritizing, like what really needs to make it, listening to all sides and making a decision.

And eventually, in this case, we got the successful go live. Not everyone could have their piece in but it was an understood, you know, why are we taking this piece of the developers and why this piece of the marketers and so forth. And eventually, morale was, you know, kept in place. And it was understood why we had made the decisions that we'd had.

And most importantly, we also set up a feedback loop for future and new product launches. So that's an example where it was well-intentioned conflict. And that's how we resolved it. But I might just say something there that it's not always well-intentioned.

Recognizing the bad apples

James: Oh, I was definitely going to pull you up on that. A couple of books on my bookshelf are about Machiavelli.

Lloyd: Oh, yeah.

James: And I learned about that concept in business, right. Someone said to me, Oh, this guy's Machiavellian. I'm like, What does that even mean? And they're like, well, he's not a good guy. You know, he's out - and I've actually seen this in business. I even came up with terms for it. There were people that I would call white ants. They're like termites, they just get in there. And they just devour everything.

Lloyd: We've seen a few of those.

James: Right, they operate from a place of self-interest. And you hear the classic one like in teaching organizations, in schools, in some public schools, it's very hard to remove a bad teacher. And they call them dead wood. Right, they just get in the system. And they just do the bare minimum, like they turn up at the last minute, they leave as early as possible, they spend all the time in the common room, they just phone it in when it comes to marking exams, or whatever, but it's hard for the leaders to move them out. And that does create conflict. And one major point I was thinking about with that, especially in a high performance sales team, is if you permit that conflict to continue, you eventually start churning team members. Have you seen that?

Lloyd: Yeah. And the problem is, in the short term, you think, Oh, but I need this person to deliver X, Y, Z. If I get them out now, the impact will be this. But it's like a short-term pain, long-term gain, you've got to get them out ASAP. And in the case of this particular toxic character for that e-commerce business, he was very unreliable, always blaming something on other people.

Sometimes it might have been someone else's fault. But he was completely unreliable and unaccountable. And just approaching problems from a place of not from collaboration, but from a place of blame. I think there was a part of him that enjoyed the trouble.

James: Some people do, right? They do bad things repeatedly because there's a payoff from it. They get the pat on the back, a poor Johnny, you know, they get the sympathy, they get the attention. From memory, in that scenario, because I think this is something I'm familiar with, the owner of the business was too sympathetic or protective or compromised by this employee, which was obviously noted by all the other employees, and it starts to disrupt the fabric of the entire culture.

Lloyd: Yeah, I mean, if they see one person getting away with it, then they start to think, well, okay, this guy turns up late, or this guy never checks in, or this guy might disappear for a day and that's fine, nothing's done about it. So this is where we had to remove that bad apple and straight after that, productivity and morale improved.

So there's definitely, for the most part where I've seen it, it's normally well-intentioned conflict, like there's a reason why they're doing something, which **is** ultimately for the best interests of the company. But it's coming from a different angle. But there are some bad apples out there. And there's nearly every company you've been to, you will find one that's been there in the past. And there's been some lessons for the founder.

The kinds of conflict you might see

James: So tell me about the developer, the developer one is probably kind of fringe to some of the examples that I would have seen. Because I wasn't, I'm not a developer, right? But I've been in service businesses. And I've been in finance-related businesses. And in a typical scenario, like mine, I've got a team of six. And we're doing mostly content stuff, publishing activities, maintaining the machine. What kind of conflicts might I be looking for, as a business owner, do you think?

A. Personal conflict

Lloyd: Yeah, I've seen a few really, and quite often they're different. So first one's personal conflict in the workplace. And this can evolve out of simple differences, like extroverts versus introverts. So an extrovert might just have something in their mind, and they might just soundboard, they haven't really thought about it much. They'll start sharing ideas.

An introvert doesn't necessarily want to open their mouth until they really come up with what they think is a solution or something. And an extrovert might interpret that as, this guy's not playing boardmate. Why aren't we working together? So this communication style, personal conflict, and it's actually a similar one there in cultural differences.

B. Cultural differences

So, quite often, Western cultures are quite assertive. And Eastern cultures can be quite indirect, almost polite, and they can perceive the assertiveness as rude. Whereas the Western culture'd be like, perceive the Eastern culture as well, I'm talking to them, are they disinterested? What's going on here? So those two - the personal and cultural ones I've just mentioned are quite similar.

C. Workstyle differences

But then you can come to another thing. Workstyle differences. So classic one I see all the time, particularly from my position, is I am a detailed, structured person, and people like me, operations folks, developers, finance people, we like plans, we like them to get executed, we like rhythm…

James: You make the trains run on time.

Lloyd: We make the trains run on time. But then you have the opposite folks who're like, spontaneous.

James: Oh, your clients.

Lloyd: They're adaptive.

James: Visionary, creatives, like slam bam, I'll do it my way types.

Lloyd: Visionaries, creatives, sales people, they're needed. They're just a different character. And sometimes they can't, you know, the spontaneous character, the visionary are like, why are they so rigid? Why are they sticking to this? But then from the detailed structure, they say, Hey, we had a plan, we were going to do this by this by this and this time, you know, if this happens, this is going to happen. There can be a bit of conflict there. And so you can't let these things simmer.

D. Strategic differences

And finally, strategic. So strategic is one where I'd say it's normally well-intentioned differences. So for example, if we were talking about marketing, one marketing campaign might have been focusing on market data, just like that statistic I mentioned at the beginning, whereas another campaign might focus on bright creative and storytelling. And so two different characters, wanting to approach a campaign from a different angle, need to get a decision made. That can create some conflict.

What do do about it

James: So what do you do about it? You've got these things in play. Obviously, I've learned coming from a different culture to my team, I've educated myself, I've asked questions, I've spent time with them, learned to weigh things, I've lived there for a while, I understand a lot more, I've got context to communicate better.

I think people have grouped out within my business into the right areas of the business where they're not stepping on each other, like two people trying to compete for the same role or whatever doesn't really happen, because we've had time to map out our activities and say, Who's doing this stuff, and everyone seems to know their station on the boat, so to speak. But there must be other things we can do?

Lloyd: Well, I might actually just say that the point of actually understanding the types of conflicts are helpful, because if you know the types, then you know, certain environments are going to lead you to certain types of conflict, like, Okay, I'm going to pair an extrovert with an introvert, perhaps I'm going to need to create some kind of regular meeting setup that's going to accommodate for both. So that's one way.

James: Is that like the visionary with integrator discussion framework?

Lloyd: Yeah, I mean, having a set agenda of what is going to be discussed, about what times they know, what to expect, like, let's stick to the program here. You can have freeform at the end. That's a good example of that. But another example might be if you're involving, say, introverts, they want to contribute, but do they want to announce it to a large group of people? Perhaps we're asking the team for ideas, and we're going to say, Okay, well, everyone submit one, they don't necessarily want to stand up and announce.

So you can accommodate for both, and avoid the perception of someone thinking, Oh, that person's not really helpful. They're not connecting to this. It can also help you tailor what you would do if there was a conflict. So if there was a personal conflict, you think, well, okay, how would I deal with that? Well, perhaps I'm going to deal with that with some mediation, or perhaps some team building exercise.

Whereas if it's something more strategic, like that marketing campaign I was talking about, that tension there might have come up because of the difference of how quickly we need a decision, like how do we get a decision on this? So having a key process in place of how we get a decision is going to resolve that conflict, that's just going to get that to move forward.

An ounce of prevention...

But finally, and most importantly out of this, is prevention. If you know this can happen, you can prevent it. And that's what we should actually be focusing on. Because it's an old quote, isn't it, that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, or something like that? If you don't end up in the conflict in the first place, it's going to be so much easier.

James: And prevention doesn't really sell that well, you know, conflict resolutions. The thing, you know, people have full-time roles as mediators, it's a big deal. There's books on it. I want to talk about that process, let's presume that we do whatever we possibly can to look for the potential types of conflicts that we put in place, systems and methodologies to reduce them happening in the first place.

Obviously, even hiring properly would help a lot, like not bringing in a superstar syndrome type person is going to come and mess with everyone or ruin the culture that you have. Establishing values would be good to have. It would be good to have reporting mechanisms so that people can be heard, etc.
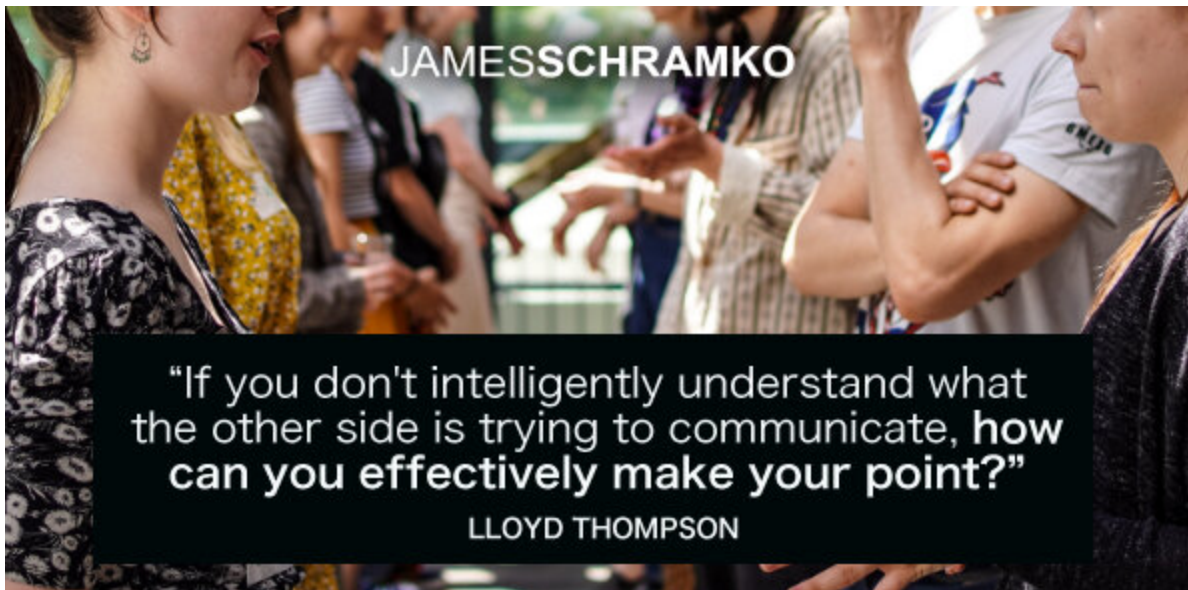
The process of mediation

Now, mediation/conflict resolution process, I've been involved in these. We've had some pretty heated conflicts in my time in the dealership. I'm interested in how you've approached these before. I'll give you a simple example. Two people having a massive blue, barney, dispute, anger, like it's basically, it's stopped production of whatever we're working on and it has to be sorted out. As the leader, what are you going to do?

Lloyd: Yeah, pull them aside. Listen to both sides. Like I would listen to both sides separately first, and see if you can bring them together to arbitrate. That's normally the most simple thing you can do, is listen to both sides before you come in all guns blazing, and say, He said this, you said that, this is what's going to happen. You really need to listen and understand. And once you understand what's going to happen, then you can make a decision. And you want to mediate the two coming together to have a discussion.

James: Do you set rules and frameworks for that?

Lloyd: Yeah, so one thing that I would normally do, I've got a simple rule, which is, if there's an issue, before it's going to get escalated to the leadership or the Director of Operations, the simple thing they should do is just give the other person a call and talk it out. I want to know that they've actually spoken to the other person. It wasn't a text message, it wasn't a Slack, or some kind of text-based form, they actually had a phone call or a Zoom call.

And the reason for that is so much is lost in the tone when you read something over a message, it's like, what is this person trying to say to me? So at least if they've gone to that level first, like they've heard the other person speak, that's one place where it might have even resolved itself.

"If you don't intelligently understand what the other side is trying to communicate, how can you effectively make your point?"

LLOYD THOMPSON

The other thing that I train people to do is listen to the other side first, and it's really hard to do that, it's negotiation, is listen to the other side first. Because if you don't intelligently understand what the other side is trying to communicate, how can you effectively make your point if you don't understand their side?

So it takes a lot of patience and EQ for that person to do that, but that's one thing you want to train them to do, listen to the other side first. When you fully understand their point, then you can make your point.

James: Yeah, along those lines, I would have a framework where each person gets to say something and the other person listens. And then the other person gets to say something and they listen. And usually, they want to jump in and start melting down, we have an override of emotion. Often they don't fully understand the whole picture. So if you can give them context, or however, that would help.

This situation needs explaining...

Sometimes you might be at the point where the two people still can't see eye to eye, and you have to make a decision. And you might upset someone to the point where they even leave. And then the other person will say thanks for backing me or supporting me, what do you do in that situation?

Lloyd: If you have to do that, that's what you have to do. But it's important to make the big explanation to the team of why. So if you want to do something, if you're going to make a change in the team, I think it's important that people know why you're doing it. And generally, I try and align these things with the values of the company, and generally these disagreements are as a result of culture, like you talked about before.

And so if you're going to make a move, make sure that everyone understands why, otherwise it might look a bit peculiar. Oh, they're going to start rumors, what happened, they're going to create their version of the story. So you're going to make a change in the business, it might mean that someone gets exited, you're going to explain why it's happening. So everyone's on the same sheet.

James: Yeah, I would always recommend that if someone leaves, I corral the whole team together and communicate as soon as possible in the interest of transparency, openness, a frank discussion about what happened, and where we go from here. Because you can bet the person that leaves is going to start piping back into the organization, Can you believe what happened?

And they'll either get, Oh, I know, it's terrible, I'm thinking of walking as well. But it's probably more like Jerry Maguire, right? Maybe one secretary with a fishbowl, but the rest of them are staying put. They're like, Man, terrible what happened, you know, I hope you find something good. Get out of my face, because I'm getting on with my job. [laughs]

Another little thing that I would do from time to time, if someone leaves, is I would take that person's salary and start adding a little bit of that back into the other people's wages, so they don't really miss them that much. I would combine that with a message saying, This person has left, we have still got all the work that we need to get done. And I appreciate people who are going to step up and start to fill that gap. Just because that's the type of person you are, that's a Cialdini labeling technique, by the way. And I also want to show my gratitude for that. And I'm going to bump your pay up to acknowledge that that's an amazing thing for you to do.

And everyone's happy. It's never backfired on me, this thing. And often, we don't need to replace. Sometimes we do. But there's going to be a learning curve, and they're going to need to learn SOPs, they're going to have to be shepherded by another person. These people are quite willing to accept that, because there's a positive association that the bad people who do wrong things leave and the good people stay and get the rewards.

The importance of catching up

Lloyd: There's a lot that can be done in terms of, that's in common with dealing with the conflict but also preventing it. And so one of those things we just talked about is when we're explaining the why to people about why this has happened, is having those one-on-ones with the team. And regularly, because that's going to prevent something flaring up. And if something has flared up, it's going to help it call back down again.

And when I've gone into businesses, I quite often see that one of the things is missing is the rhythms that run the operation. Some of these, they're lacking a bit. And if they do have rhythms or meetings that run the business, like the team meetings, where they're looking at the reds and greens, the sales numbers, the marketing numbers, the operations numbers, and yada yada, one of the things that gets dropped first is the one-on-one catch ups for team members.

And you might think, Oh, is that really necessary, to catch up with people? But the thing is, if that's neglected, then things start simmering up, you know? You're not aware of what, is this person having any challenges with somebody else? Or has something happened that was a conflict, and there's still something brewing?

And it's important to say, Well, okay, how's it going? And, are you aligned in your goals? Give them feedback, check in, so forth. But if you don't do that, then yes, the problems start brewing again. And having these catch-ups regularly can quite often be transformative to a business. But unfortunately, it's one of the first things that gets dropped.

James: It's like a temperature check. You know, one of the things I found fascinating about the Oura ring that Zac Mason told me to get is it detects changes in your body temperature. So it recognizes when you're getting sick, because if your temperature goes up a degree or so, then there's something wrong.

And that's like having a temperature check with your team. I always had confidants or people in the grapevine that I would either go for a walk with them after work, like I did fitness with some of them, I would have coffee with some of them down and the thing. I'd be interested in them, in their lives and what they're up to and be so connected that it doesn't take long for things to transmit through that grapevine, when there's something going on, when there's a fight happening or a dispute.

It happened a lot in the sales environment. I'm thinking back in my dealership days, it was stuff that was instantaneous fire, like a customer would walk out of the showroom. And then another salesperson would run into my office and say, That's my customer. Lloyd's just signed this guy up, and he's going to get the commission, but I'm the one who got him into the showroom. And I'm the one who's been following him up.

And I'd say, Well, let's just start with the details. I'd always put the emotion to the side and say, Can you go and show me the writeup sheet? Can you bring me all the sales notes you've got from when, and then we'd try and get to the point where, how did this guy end up in the showroom, but he didn't ask for you? Or didn't want to deal with you? Is there a chance he's even avoiding you, right? And then we'd get to the truth at the end of the day. Maybe the person actually did ask for them at reception.

And I remember there was this guy I used to sell with, Jerry. He was a funny guy. If someone walked into the showroom, and there was two guys at the showroom, the first place I worked, there was Jerry, and there was Guy, and they sat next to each other. And if Guy was on his lunch break or down the back of the dealership, and someone walked in, and said, Hello, yes, I'm looking for Guy.

Jerry would go up and he'd say, Welcome to the showroom. Guy, Guy, hmm, they come and they go, can I help you sir? And he would take the sale, he would steal the sale straight off Guy, sign them up, get paid the commission, and sometimes Guy would see this customer driving off in a new car like a week later. Like, That's my guy!

And next thing you know, they're in the manager's office screaming at each other and the manager - and that's a conflict. That has to be resolved. And you have to figure out what's going on. Jerry's not going to say, Oh, well actually, he asked for you, but I just told him you weren't here anymore. He's not going to say that. So you've really got to be a detective sometimes to figure out, what the hell is going on?

Lloyd: I'm cringing at this. But it all boils back to culture.

James: Oh man, I could tell you 100 stories like this, but I've seen every type of conflict - I mean, look, the second last place I worked, Lloyd, the two bosses had such a big fight that had ended up in the legal courts, that one of them lost everything. And this is the same guy, by the way, one of these guys, he spat on me and threatened to kill me with a steak knife.

It was conflict with a capital C, right? It was hardcore. What it meant for me is I needed to go work somewhere else. What it meant for the partners is they had a massive blue. One of them lost everything and ended up living in the side of a road in a car. And apparently, he's passed, right, lost everything. That's like, the ultimate conflict. And this is the guy, by the way, who taught me about brinkmanship. The tactic of taking something right to the edge, but not too far that you blow it up. Well, he blew it up.

Lloyd: Wow! Do you really want to put your hand that close to the fire?
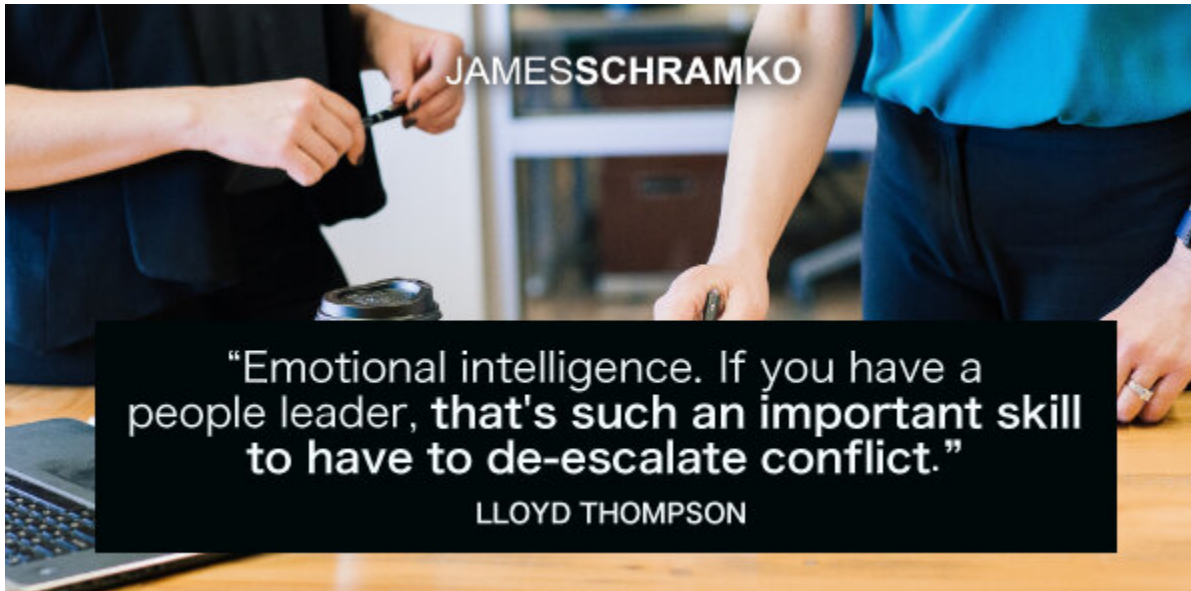
James: This guy did every day, he would park his Ferrari so close to the door of the stairwell that someone would open it and ding the car, so that he could now scream at someone and sack them. I had to walk around with Spidey senses, because someone's going to lose their job anytime soon when this guy's around, because he would set them up. And it was a lot of screaming. There was a lot of anger. There was a lot of tension. It was so stressful. But I went to work most days having to deal with conflict. And it was awful, just ridiculous stuff.

Lloyd: Yeah.

The crucial thing for conflict managers

James: So what skill would you say is the most important for someone who's going to be managing conflicts?

Lloyd: Ah, it's definitely going to be emotional intelligence. And if you're going to hire a people leader, they have to be aware of what's happening with the people, like in terms of their emotions, not just, are they getting stuff done, and then how are they going to be able to de-escalate that? And it's not something that I know how it's trained. It's more, when I'm interviewing for that kind of role, I'm looking at how are they going to handle these situations, role playing things out?

"Emotional intelligence. If you have a people leader, **that's such an important skill to have to de-escalate conflict.**"

LLOYD THOMPSON

And you can easily start to get a flavor of, you know, Oh, am I just going to fire this person? Or am I going to intelligently listen to what's happening and then work from there? So emotional intelligence. If you have a people leader, that's such an important skill to have to de-escalate conflict.

James: My old boss was such a bad leader in that regard that he was best suited to - he actually lived on the Gold Coast, and flew down to Sydney every day, and then flew back. We preferred it when he was away. Then he went away for months. And then when he came back, he was in a rage.

So what would the playbook look like? Give us a couple of strategies. So I'm just thinking, next time I have a conflict come up, what am I writing down here on my notes that I could pull out as a framework?

When the best tactic is avoidance

Lloyd: There's a few different options for avoiding conflict. One of them's not necessarily easy to put in the workplace, but I want to put it here for completeness. Avoidance. In terms of, you're dealing with someone, if you don't have to deal with them, don't deal with them. So I can think about this in my personal life, I've had a difficult neighbor.

James: Me too. I've only really used this strategy in the last few years, because I've dealt with two people in my life who are masters at avoidance. I mean, my last boss was good at avoidance. He was a lovely guy, but he was impossible to find, and I could never get a decision from. But it was remarkable how many bullets he missed by just not even being a target. Things just died away. They went up to his office and they never got saw again. And then that was the end of it.

"Sometimes it really serves you **just to not respond.**"
- JAMES SCHRAMKO

So it was actually quite a lesson for me. But I do know a couple of people in my personal life who will just not communicate or respond or react. And lately, especially if you're on social media, for example, sometimes it really serves you just to not respond. The most powerful thing you can do is not react, not respond, not reply to that terse email.

That's like the guy that bought the last surfboard from me. I listed the board and then he sent me a lowball offer. That was the only line he put. The board was like $710. And he just put 500. And so I just replied back, No, you know, I don't want to reeducate him of why that's just insulting to offer such a low amount.

And you know what, within an hour, the guy's around at my place giving me 700 bucks. So it's like, but I'm not going to engage. I'm not going to say, eff off or, you know, don't lowball me, you dickhead. I had immediate rage. And then I'm like, no, this guy, maybe I just should feel sorry for him. Maybe I should have compassion that he's...

Lloyd: That's the way to go.

James: ...down to his last 500. And I'll just say no. Let's keep it simple.

Lloyd: And it's hard to do this in the workplace. Although you've given me an example of someone sounded like they were master. But generally, you are going to have to deal with that person regularly. But I mean, sometimes yeah, it's not going to be worth it. I can think of times where I've been in the surf, and someone's dropped in on me.

James: It's normally the other way around, isn't it, Lloyd? [laughs]

Lloyd: Never, never. I never do that, James, come on. [laughs] It's a party wave. If I'm doing it, it's a party wave.

James: Associated with the phrase, party wave, right, that's it.

**Lloyd:** As long as you shout, party wave, before you drop in, it's fine. [laughs]

James: In your mind, that is. I have actually been avoiding talking about it, Lloyd. But someone has to - one day, you will get an intervention as you set foot on the sand, there'd be seven people ring around you say, Lloyd, nobody likes a party wave. Okay? [laughs]

Lloyd: [laughs] I can think about the times where people have dropped in on me intentionally, no party wave. And that's happened. And the few times where I've actually said, Hey, mate, look, I actually said something to try and reason with them, it never comes off well. And just think about it for a minute. Just have a - is it really going to happen that person's going to go, Oh, I'm terribly sorry. Yeah, I listened to what you said. And I'm going to do that. I have actually done that to someone before, but it's rare.

James: Well often they say, Oh, sorry, mate, I didn't see you. It actually makes me think about the time I went down to a cafe down there in Manly, and there was two kids waiting in the line for the cash register. And they just dumped rubbish on the floor of the cafe right there in front of me. And I just said, Oy, pick it up. And you know, he just looks at me, he goes, Thanks, dad! And he didn't pick it up. And then he paid and then walked off.

And I just thought, that's disgraceful behavior. But I was proud of myself for saying something. If the worst insult he can call me is a dad, I have five kids, I'm actually bonafide dad. But I mean, yeah, I mean, it would have been nice if he picked it up. But I bet you he'd think twice about it next time, because he was probably just being tough guy at the moment. But he might think, oh, maybe someone will see me, I'll just put it in the bin. That's my hopeful, hopeful intention for this person.

So okay, avoid. I've seen a master at that. And it does make sense. Why take on a conflict? Why win the battle, but lose the war? Why go there? If it'll fade away, let it fade away.
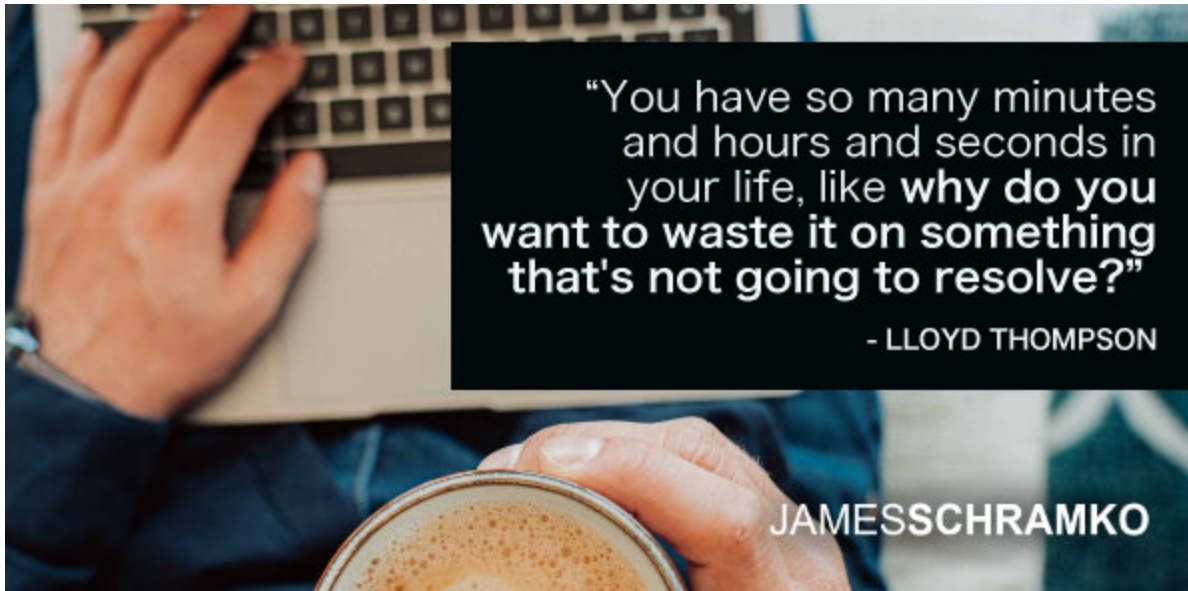
Lloyd: You have so many minutes and hours and seconds in your life, like why do you want to waste it on something that's not going to resolve? It's just going to make - just forget it.

James: What is it, a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion, still? There's a lot of battles that you're not going to - especially again, social media, but you know, some people have a set, they've just got a way that they're thinking and they're not going to be convinced otherwise. And if it's not going to disrupt everything, just let it go. Okay, what's number two?

An ideal scenario: collaboration

Lloyd: Yeah, collaboration. I mean, it sounds so obvious, collaborate, that's the ideal scenario. However, there's a catch. Quite often, collaboration involves someone compromising. So if you find over time, the same players are resulting in one person getting their way and the other person compromising or accommodating, then what's happening is, decisions are skewed in one direction, and that might not be the right direction for the company.

And then at the same time, the person who's always compromising and accommodating, they might start to feel resentful. So this is something where you as a leader need to be aware, hang on, what's happening here? Is it just the loudest person's who's getting their way?

James: Oh, like brainstorming, the person with the volume of ideas or the loudest voice gets their ideas set, and everyone else gets upset.

Lloyd: Yeah. So you have to keep a track of that and call it out. And make sure that that's not happening. And that's two sides. That's both a person that's perhaps pushing their agenda so much and not listening to the other side, but then the person who's accommodating and just being conflict-avoidant, like, there is a place for conflict.

And both sides need to be able to articulate what they need, especially in a game where there are a number of factors to be considered, there is a deadline coming up, and we do have a number of things that we need to choose from to go into that new product. So collaborate.

James: You just raised an interesting point there that, you know, there is going to be conflict. Is it possible that some conflict is good? And we hear anecdotes about people like Steve Jobs who kind of like to be challenged sometimes, and sometimes they want to debate, they want some conflict because they might feel that it brings out the best, and maybe it sort of fits into that Tony Robbins thing of, things happen for you.

These conflicts grow you and take you up a notch and let you think about things. I'd certainly, when I'm in a conflict, it makes me think about people's positions, like the lowballer. It made me think, you know, Is he right? Is he just being a dick? What is it worth? Should I bother justifying it? Should I not? What do I think I can sell it for to someone else?

All these things go through my mind. Hilarious story around that. It's the same guy who tried to buy it a month before and low balled me, and I blocked him on Facebook, but he came through Gumtree this time. [laughs]

Lloyd: [laughs] He really wants to buy your stuff, James.

James: He wants my stuff.

Lloyd: So many attempts. He's going to grow on you.

James: It's true when I, say you want to buy my surfboards, I've usually not ridden them that many times. And I look after them beautifully. And they're in pristine condition. I would like to buy my secondhand things, cars, surfboards. They're always immaculate.

Lloyd: So I will say on this collaboration piece, and you asked me that question, is there a place for conflict? I think there is, it just, it needs to be controlled and reined in. Like, if it's just going to go on and on and escalate and escalate, it's pointless and needs to be measured. And so for example, if there has been a point of which, or a process of which a decision is made, both sides have raised their points, they're deadlocked in their positions.

There's going to be, okay, it's going to this side, the person who's accountable for the area has said, This is the decision that's being made. It's going this way. We're going to go with this campaign, we're going to go with these things. Then the other side who didn't get their way can disagree, that's fine, but they have to commit to it, disagree and commit. And I can't remember, is that a Jeff Bezos thing? I can't remember where I first heard that. But I immediately lashed.

James: It does sound like Bezos, he would have that philosophy.

Lloyd: So there is a place for conflict. And that brings me to my third point, which sounds similar.

James: Yeah, ultimate. I'd see you in a school debate team - which brings me to my third point.

Lloyd: [laughs] Not in my school, James, a bit rougher than that. [laughs]

James: [laughs] I'll see you behind the shed at three. [laughs]

Lloyd: That's more like it. [laughs]

James: I don't think many people know you used to fight for a living at one point. That's crazy, isn't it?

Lloyd: I was a kickboxer, kickboxing and salsa dancing.

James: I think I'm actually in your - I'm almost in your former weight division now as I get under 95.

Lloyd: You're heading there. Yeah.

James: I'm under 95 right now.

Lloyd: My last category was 80 to 85. And my coach said, If you get over 85, we're going to get murdered. And I said, All right.

James: All right. Well, I'm still a bit heavy then.

Then there's where you negotiate

Lloyd: So where were we? Last one, negotiate. So collaborate often involves compromise, and a bit of accommodating, and you've got to keep an eye on that. Last one, negotiate. So it's a little bit - it is healthy. But that's where we need to be really careful that it doesn't escalate. And so quite often, the negotiation does need the arbitration and the mediation.

James: Do you call it negotiation? Like, do you label it as such?

Lloyd: Not in the workplace. But that's what it is.

James: Yeah, I wouldn't - almost in no situation would I call a negotiation a negotiation. Like, especially in sales, like bad salespeople, they say, Okay, let's negotiate now. Bad customers do, too. Okay, it's time to negotiate, right? It's what that guy was doing to me, without saying negotiation. But if you're not labeling it negotiation, you might say, Look, I can see we're at different parts here, so we're going to have to find a way that we can all sit at the table and make an outcome that works somewhat for most people. And then we'll make our decision, and we'll just move forward. Is that what you're saying?

Lloyd: Yeah. And that's what it is. But the most important piece is the act of listening. And that was reinforced recently. I can't remember the name of the book, but it was Chris Voss who was the FBI, hostage negotiator. And when you look at the core of what his strategy is, it's listening to the other side and taking note of everything that they want.

It's not saying they're going to get it. But understanding everything they need, keep playing it out, and that will resolve a lot of things, just getting a clear understanding of what they want. Because when you understand what they want, and what drives them to there, perhaps there can be some middle ground.

What would you do in my place?

But if you just say, if I'm not listening to you, and you're saying I want this and I want this, how long is that going to go on for? And probably the best negotiation I've heard, this one really rang out to me was, I think it was Joe Biden years ago when he was like a…

James: When he had a brain that wasn't mush, and he could put words out in a single sentence?

Lloyd: No comment.

James: Well I'll say it, I've seen videos that don't put him in a good light.

Lloyd: Long before he was the president. He was dealing with his equivalent in Russia. And he was sent over to agree some terms on something. He was getting absolutely nowhere with this more senior character, he was a junior, this other guy was more senior. And then he said, Look, I'm going to have to go back to the White House. And I'm going to have to say this, I've achieved nothing. And so I just put this final thing to you. I'm not asking for your advice. What would you do if you were me?

And so the Russian guy looked at him and said, Okay, well, okay, let's have a look at it from your side of the table. Listened to all his points, from his point of view, and actually gave him some concessions. Isn't that amazing?

James: It is amazing. I would have thought he'd say, If I were you, I would just jump out of a window because you're useless.

Lloyd: [laughs] Yeah, well, there you go. It's a very different come at it. And so that's actually one of the ways, if I've got to get something from somebody, like it might come like lazy thinking. But sometimes I just think, instead of telling someone, I think this, I'm going to do this, I'm going to say, Hey, look, this is what I'm seeing. If you were me, how would you play it?

And this one comes up a lot of the time with clients. I had one client the other day, and he's got someone who's delivering something for him. It was a creative, third party company. And every time, this thing's late, and he was thinking, well, maybe I want to introduce a penalty for something being late.

He said, but the problem is, I get on really well with this guy, we have a good relationship. And when it is delivered, the work is good. I don't want to spoil my relationship. I said, well, before you go down that road, just tell him what you're seeing. And then ask him, what would you do if you were me? And the other guy introduced it, just said, Yeah, I'll let someone else do it under your team. And you know, if it's beyond this time, we'll give it for less.

James: Sounds like when people volunteer a swear jar, they want to curb a habit.

Lloyd: Yeah, he knew it was happening. So that's a much - same outcome, different approach.

James: It's how I got on stage at a couple of events. I'd go up to the event organizer, and I'd say, Listen, people keep asking me if I'm speaking at this event. And I say no. And they say, why not? And I'm just wondering, like, how do you suggest I answer that? And they say, Well, look, you should have my spot. So that's how that happened.

Lloyd: Wow. That's a great example. Well, the only thing I missed that I really wanted to cover here was, we've talked about prevention. And we've talked about conflict, is after the conflict, because it doesn't always like, magically disappear.

James: You think it boils below and then resurfaces? Like a volcano spurting lava, taking out everything in the village? Yeah, I've seen that.

Lloyd: You can say , Oh, yeah, okay. Okay, boss. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

James: The enemy goes away, you didn't completely slay them, and they build themselves back stronger with better vengeance, and they come back and demolish.

Lloyd: You've got to keep an eye on it. So once you manage to get everyone to put their weapons down, you need to check in regularly, make sure, communicate a lot with them. Have those one-on-ones I was talking about earlier. Make sure it's still okay. And the minute something starts to flare up again, jump in there.

James: Could you send a gift to each one of them sent from the other person on their behalf? [laughs]

Lloyd: [laughs] That might be an interesting social experiment. I think Mr. Beast might want to do something like that. Well, you heard it right here first.

James: That guy loves giving away. If you want a big following, just give away money. It's straightforward. No, he is a beast. I love that guy. Okay, so basically, when we're navigating team conflict, having harmony, we've talked about preventing it from happening with a deep understanding of what sort of conflicts are likely, heading them off at the pass.

If they do happen, we try and set up a framework and resolve it individually and then bring people together. Kumbaya hugs, we collaborate, we negotiate. Sometimes we terminate if it just can't work out, and if it all seems to be resolved, then we keep an eye on it and check on it later or something like that.

Lloyd: That's right. Reinforce that positive culture in your business. That's the single most important thing, is keep that culture going.

James: If I were to have more questions about this, Lloyd, how would I get in touch with you?

Lloyd: Yeah, just email me, lloyd@virtualdoo.com.

James: Love it. Thank you. Always good to catch up.

Lloyd: Thanks for having me, James.

James: We'll pop this up on episode 1021. Some great memories, some good flashbacks there. Thank you. [laughs]

Lloyd: My pleasure, James.

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