EP55 | The Inner Game of Conflict: Informed Amnesia, the French Open, and the Matches We Play Ins... Transcript

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Built specifically for professionals [music] who want to keep more of what they earn. Check out joingelb.com. That's j o i n g e l t dot com. >> [music] >> If you work in healthcare, you already know this. Conflict is everywhere.

In the OR, >> [music] >> in labor and delivery, in committee meetings, between physicians, nurses, administrators, and teams that are all trying to do the right thing.

But here's the problem.

SPARK Framework for Healthcare Conflict

Most of us were never trained to handle conflict well. We learned procedures. We learned diagnostics. But we didn't learn how to [music] navigate the moments when two professionals strongly disagree.

That's why I developed the SPARK framework. SPARK stands for stop, pause, ask, don't assume, reflect and respond, [music] and create a path forward. It's a practical system designed specifically [music] for high-stakes healthcare environments.

Through keynote [music] talks, residency workshops, and SPARK master classes, I teach physicians, nurses, and healthcare teams how to turn destructive [music] conflict into productive conversations to strengthen [music] teams and improve care.

If your hospital, residency program, or medical conference is looking for a speaker on conflict, communication, [music] and leadership in healthcare, I'd love to work with you.

You can learn more in the show notes. Because in medicine, conflict is inevitable. But handled well, it can [music] make teams stronger. >> [music] >> In every operating room, in every ward, in every clinic, and every team meeting, a silent battle brews.

Conflict, negotiation, identity.

Scalpel and Sword Podcast Intro

Welcome to the Scalpel and Sword Podcast, where I, Dr. Lee Shorma, >> [music] >> physician and conflict analyst, explore the hidden negotiations behind modern medicine.

Let's trade burnout for boundaries and learn the art of healing with precision >> [music] >> and power. Hello, my peaceful warriors, and welcome to the Scalpel and Sword Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Lee Shorma, physician and conflict analyst.

And today, I want to take you to Paris. Not just to Paris, I want to take you to the French Open. And even not then, just the French Open. I want to take you to the invisible match happening underneath every match you see.

Because while the world watches athletes slide across red clay under impossible pressure, there's another game unfolding. The game between memory and presence, between fear and instinct, between ego and performance.

And surprisingly, this has everything to do with conflict.

French Open and the Inner Game of Conflict

Conflict in medicine, in leadership, in marriage, in negotiation, in surgery, and in parenting. Today, we're going to connect three ideas. The inner game of tennis by Timothy Gallwey, the psychological warfare unfolding at the French Open, and the concept I call informed amnesia. The ability to remember the lesson without carrying the emotional weight of the last point.

Because the people who succeed under pressure are not the people who never fail. They're the ones who know how to forget correctly. If you've ever read The Inner Game of Tennis, it's one of the most important books ever written about performance psychology. And the irony is it's barely about tennis. Gallwey proposes that every person has two selves. Self one, which is critical, an analytical, fearful voice.

And self two, the natural performer, the body, the instinct, that beautiful flow state. Self one says, "Don't miss. You're always going to choke. Why did you say that?

They're judging me. You're losing control." Self two just her forms. Fluidly, naturally, without over control. And conflict works exactly the same way.

Most conflict escalation is not caused by the original disagreement. It's caused by self one. The commentary, the narrative, the replay. Someone questions your decision in a meeting. Immediately self one activates.

They don't respect me. I always have to defend myself. I can't look weak. This always happens. And suddenly you're no longer responding to the actual moment.

You're responding to accumulated memory. That is the inner game of conflict. And nowhere do we see this more clearly than at the French Open. Clay courts are psychologically brutal. The points are longer.

Momentum shifts slowly. Errors linger. You can't overpower clay the way you can on grass or a hard court. Clay exposes impatience. It exposes emotional instability. And the athletes who survive Roland Garros are rarely the most emotional players.

They're the ones with the shortest memory. Not because they don't care, but because they understand something profound. The last point is informational, not existential. Think about the greatest clay court players. Rafael Nadal built an entire dynasty around emotional reset rituals. Towel placement, breathing, stepping patterns. And people mocked the rituals, but the rituals were never superstition. They were neurological interruption patterns. A deliberate return to the present moment. Elite performers know something medicine often forgets. You cannot execute under pressure while emotionally carrying previous mistakes.

And yet, this is exactly what happens in healthcare conflict. A surgeon carries resentment from a prior operating room interaction. A resident carries humiliation from a prior attending encounter.

A nurse carries emotional exhaustion from three prior patient interactions. And now, everyone is playing the current point while emotionally replaying old matches. And that is how systems destabilize.

So, let's talk about the concept of informed amnesia. This is not denial. This is not pretending conflict never happened. This is not passivity. Informed amnesia means I retain the lesson without reliving the emotional injury. That distinction changes everything.

Because unresolved emotional memory distorts perception. You stop seeing people as they are. You start seeing them as representatives of prior pain. This happens constantly in medicine.

A trainee gets publicly embarrassed once, and now every correction feels like an attack. An attending gets challenged repeatedly. And now every question feels like insubordination.

An administrator gets burned by conflict and now avoids hard conversations entirely. Past points begin controlling current performance. Galway would say self one becomes too loud. Conflict analysts might call this narrative fusion. Neuroscience might call it predictive coding. Spiritually, we might call it bondage to memory. But the principle is the same.

If you cannot reset psychologically, you cannot perform relationally. At the French Open, players understand something deeply. You do not win by emotionally litigating the previous point.

You win by preparing for the next one. And in conflict management, this becomes transformational. Imagine saying, "I learned from that interaction, but I refuse to emotionally drag it into this one." That is informed amnesia.

And interestingly, the healthiest teams often aren't teams with zero conflict. They're teams with rapid emotional reset capability. That's very different. Because psychologically mature people know how to metabolize tension. They repair quickly. They don't store every grievance indefinitely. One of the most dangerous things in medicine is accumulated emotional residue.

Because medicine trains memory relentlessly. Remember the anatomy. Remember the protocol. Remember the complications. Because nobody teaches physicians what to forget.

And some things must be forgotten properly. Not erased, integrated. There is a difference. Elite athletes understand this instinctively. You can watch a player double fault on championship point and somehow return composed 2 minutes later. That's trained cognition.

But in medicine, a difficult patient interaction at 8:00 a.m. can emotionally contaminate an entire day. One hostile email can dysregulate a leadership team for weeks. One harsh comment during residency can echo for decades.

Why? Because many high-achieving people become historians of emotional injury. And conflict cannot improve in organizations where everyone is archiving grievances. At some point, leadership requires selective release. Again, not ignorance, not naivete, informed amnesia. So, as you watch the French Open this year, watch the space between points, not just the winners. Watch the recovery.

Watch the reset. Watch how elite performers let go without losing awareness. Because that may be the single most important conflict skill any of us can learn.

Not avoiding mistakes. Not dominating opponents. But refusing to become psychologically trapped by prior moments. The inner game of conflict is rarely about the other person.

It's about whether self one is hijacking your ability to remain present. And peaceful warriors understand this. Every conversation is a new point. Every interaction is unwritten.

And wisdom is not having no memory. Wisdom is knowing which memories deserve permanent residence. Thank you for joining me on the Scalpel and Sword podcast. If this episode resonated with you, share it with a physician, leader, coach, athlete, or anyone learning how to perform under pressure without becoming imprisoned by the past.

And remember, the strongest people are not the ones who never lose points. They're the ones who know how to reset before the next serve. Until next time, stay sharp, stay peaceful, and keep practicing the inner game.

>> [music] >> Every episode is an invitation to speak, to negotiate, to choose. I'm Dr. Lee [music] Sharma. Join the dialogue by subscribing to Scalpel and Sword.

Until next time, peaceful warriors. May your choices [music] be sharp and your voice be even sharper. This podcast

[music] is a reflection of lived experience and research in conflict resolution. The Scalpel and Sword is not intended as medical [music] or legal guidance. For personal matters, please consult a qualified professional.