

Transcript for Winifred Reilly | It Takes One to Tango (Episode 661)

Full show notes found here: <https://theartofcharm.com/661/>

WINIFRED: I sometimes think about this as the Velcro theory of relationships. If I don't have the fuzzy part -- You ever have Velcro that doesn't stick?

JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm, I'm Jordan Harbinger and I'm here with producer Jason DeFillippo. On this episode, we're talking with Winifred Reilly. She is the author of *It Takes One to Tango: How I Rescued My Marriage With (Almost) No Help from My Spouse and How You Can, Too*. At first I was like, "I don't care about this. My marriage isn't on the rocks. This is no big deal." She has serious gems. There is a lot of knowledge dropped in here.

Today we'll discover a specific belief about relationships that many people have backwards, this one actually surprised me, we'll shatter the idea that it takes equal effort and participation when it comes to problem solving inside the relationship, and we'll uncover hidden rules, invisible scripts that are created inside relationships, usually without saying a word that can often cause problems that are disguised as other causes in the first place. She's been a marriage therapist for decades here so you can imagine the kind of wisdom we're bringing here. So, if you're in any kind of relationship at all, or you want to be, you'll really dig this episode. Now, let's chat with Winifred Reilly.

You would think any therapist would be speaking from, "Here's my experience with what works with my clients," and then they would not write a book if they had exactly the same wisdom as everybody else, and yet here we are with 8,000 books that all say the same thing. Except, what you've got -- even the title is counterintuitive, *It Takes One to Tango: How I Rescued My Marriage with (Almost) No Help from My Spouse and How You Can, Too*. I've got to say, first things first, from the title on, you rescued your marriage with almost no help from your spouse, there's a lot of right now going, "Well if he or if she doesn't work on this, then maybe I don't want to be married." So, what

happened here? Why would you even want to do something like this unilaterally in the first place?

WINIFRED: Well, because most people buy into the concept called "It takes two to tango," except for that it doesn't work because most of the time it's 40/60 or sometimes it's 90/10, sometimes you're with somebody who feels like marriage is okay, it's not great, but you're reaching for pie in the sky, or somebody has given up, or they're one foot out the door.

And so, conventional wisdom, and a lot of traditional therapy would say, well you can't do anything if your spouse doesn't want to sign on and that cuts out a huge number and really, what can happen, is that one person can take the lead. So, I think about, people always love the idea of leadership at work, take the lead, take a stand, but in marriage you're supposed to stay back at the lowest common denominator. So, that just doesn't make sense to me.

JORDAN: Yeah, we come to relationships with all these maybe mistaken preconceived notions about what's causing the problems, we have the same ineffective tools to address a lot of these problems, and I think a lot of us -- and tell me if you agree -- we've had crappy role models or we've had idealized role models where it's like, "You know, my aunt and uncle, they're 70 and they never fight. He's so sweet to her."

WINIFRED: I think that that stuff is so damaging. It's almost that the idealized aspects are worse. Everybody knows what it looks like when the lockhorns go at it and people say, "Oh, yeah, that's terrible, we really shouldn't do that," but when you idealize the people who say, "We never had a fight," -- I once put a post up on the Huffington Post about what to do when you're fighting and there were actually commenters who said, "I've been married 29 years and my husband and I have never had an argument," and then now and again you'd get a commenter saying, "Well whoopee for you, but what about the rest of us?"

So, there's this idea that we're supposed to have it go smoothly so when things go rough, as they inevitably do, people think something is wrong. And I like to say, "No, we have so much to learn, that's the problem." Most of us go into marriage or really into relationships with preconceived ideas about what works and when they don't work, we think, "Oh, maybe I picked the wrong person, maybe there's something wrong with me," or when things get really hard, people say, "I'm going to move on," it's kind of cliché, "If it's this hard, something must be wrong." So that idealized thing really gets in people's heads and it keeps them stuck and it makes them give up or think that there's something wrong with them.

JORDAN: Yeah, if we could dose grandma with some truth serum and they said, "Yeah, we never had one single fight," what you might find is one person is always giving way to the other person and has been miserable about it for a long time. They haven't fought because one person just goes, "Yep, I'm not getting my way again and that's how it's been for the last 40 years and that's how it's going to be until we die."

WINIFRED: Yeah, there's that terrible thing, what does it say, like, "The way to have a happy marriage is just to say, 'Yes dear, I'm wrong, and I apologize,'" or something like that.

JORDAN: Yeah.

WINIFRED: Yeah, isn't that wonderful? Yeah, so there's this idealization or there really are people who didn't see how to do it well and so what I say is, it doesn't actually matter what you come in with, we all start as novices. We start as beginners, and then we learn on the job. And then one of the things that happens is that we run into trouble. Two people are not the same, of course we're going to run into trouble. We run into trouble with our neighbors, we run into trouble driving, so why would we not run into trouble, in some way, banging into our differences with a person who we're trying to make a life together with?

JORDAN: A lot of people, of course, have bought into the stereotypes that it takes two to tango, it's a two way street, everybody's got to meet each other halfway or whatever. There's all those kinds of tropes and cliches that you hear, but you're saying, "Hey, look, sometimes that's not really what's going to solve this issue or these issues."

WINIFRED: Actually, often it's not because -- One one person is more hopeful than the other, one person is more creative, one person has more energy, one person has better skills, and so, if we drop down to, "I'm not going to take a step if you're not going to take a step," or, "I'm not going to talk about it if you don't want to talk about it," then we're stuck down at the lowest level, where -- People say, "You know, what I'd really like to do is say this," and I say, "Go ahead and say it." "Well, but he's going to react to react this way." "She's not going to like it," and so that's really what the one to tango idea is about. You don't meet in the middle. We go as far as we need to go. We repeat ourselves.

So, let's say your partner has had too much to drink and you're about to get in the car and every time you've always gotten in the car and you've held on to the door and you've prayed and then one day you say, "I'm not getting in the car. Give me the keys," and the person says, "I haven't had too much to drink," and you either buckle at that moment or you say, "Really, give me the keys." And sometimes you hang in there and it's scary. That's a moment where you're not meeting in the middle. You're going all the way.

JORDAN: Yeah, I think a lot of folks in relationships, and I've seen this in my inbox, I've seen it among AoC clients and I've seen this of course in our own relationships, one partner might be scared of making changes or not interested in making changes because they think everything is fine, because maybe they're the one that's always getting their way, or one person has got one foot out the door, so they're kind of not committed to it or they're thinking, "Eh, it's already broken. It's going to take too much work," and the other person sort of doesn't agree with that.

What does the more hopeful partner do in this particular situation because it sounds like a lot of work and a little sad?

WINIFRED:

It's sad but what I think is even sadder is people giving up when they really don't have to. So, I probably would have given up. It's not like my marriage was so awful. We were stuck, my husband did not want to actually buy into some of the ideas that I had, I thought, "Okay, I can keep banging my head against trying to get my husband to sign onto this concept," that you have to focus on yourself, you have to take care of how you respond, you can't blame other people for your actions and reactions, be accountable for yourself, take the lead, take risks, and so it was sort of a paradox for me to say, "Come on honey, let's do this thing where we both stand on our own feet separately. Come on honey, do this with me," as opposed to, "Wait a minute, I'm just going to start changing the way I respond in my life and see what happens."

And it wasn't instantaneous, this is not something that changed in a moment, it actually honestly, a large part of the work took at least a year for me to be able to really change the way I responded to our circuitous arguments or his wonderfully crafted defenses, his comments that would just make me go dumbfounded, and little by little, I started to change the way I interacted with him and then it really picked up steam. But initially, it was just me looking at, "What am I contributing?" not at all, "What is he contributing?" but, "Why am I responding this way? What's really going on here? Why does this throw me? Why when he says this do I get so upset? How do I go from being a bright, well put together person, to a bumbling frustrated infant? How does this happen?"

So, I started to watch my own reactions and my own actions and the things that I would do that would actually inflame him and ways in which that I didn't see a lot about what it was that I did because I was very busy focused on him.

JORDAN:

So, what's the difference between this and just giving way all the time yourself? Because I know there's some people out

there that are going, "Why should I have to give all the time? This isn't fair at all."

WINIFRED:

Yes, and it's absolutely not fair. We all kind of learned that in second, third grade. People said, "Yeah, I know. It's not going to be fair. Your sister is going to get the bigger piece of cake." It's how it's going to go. If we let go of fairness, and we just think about what's smart. Is it smart to say, "I have a good idea but I'm not going to actually present it," or, "We're doing something that I think is dysfunctional and I'm not going to change my part in it or challenge it because she's not doing her part?" It's just not smart and we don't really do it in that many other places in life. If somebody is dropping the ball at work, we don't all just sit around and watch things go down the drain. People think it's not fair and instead you think about, "What are my resources? What can I bring?"

I was more level-headed when we argued, than my husband, initially. He became much more level-headed as time went on. But, if I have the ability to have perspective, why not bring that? When things are not going well, somebody has a good sense to say, "Hold on, pause. This isn't working," or somebody looks at their own behavior and says, "What I just did wasn't effective, hold on, let's have a do-over." All that stuff is unilateral and you're not going to agree. I might say, "This fight is ridiculous."

Let's say I say, "This fight is stupid," my husband says, "No, it's important," and I would say, "No, actually. I think it's dumb. I think we're going around in circles." He'd say, "No, I think it's important." And so what would I do? Does that mean I should have this fight or I should say, "No, I think that what we're doing is getting caught in a loop and I think we should pause?" And so, fairness just goes out the window when you think about, "What can I bring? What are my strengths?" Fairness sort of focuses on, "My spouse has this sort of weakness or this shortcoming and I'm not going to do more because it's not fair."

JORDAN:

I'm being victimized by this and it's unequal in some way, but the result of this two to tango, meet halfway philosophy is

sometimes it can people stuck. So, we're admitting, "Okay, it's not fair. It does suck," but it advocated almost this passivity sometimes when what's needed is action or you get halfway and you go, "I'm doing everything right," and you stand on this weird relationship highground and yet scoreboard, everything is still screwed up.

WINIFRED:

And you know, they always go to the worst. They say to me they imagine a person who's completely disengaged, hateful -- If you take all the worst characteristics of somebody and then you challenge this and you say, "What do you do then?" it's still the same. People have to decide, "I'm going to be in this relationship," or, "I'm not going to be in this relationship," and if they choose to be in the relationship, then what they can do is either feel stuck and be driven completely nuts by whatever it is that their spouse does that's difficult, or they can get ahold of themselves and figure out what they're going to do.

And I'm more interested in people being empowered and creative and going out of their comfort zone and taking risks than staying stuck in a miserable marriage. Sometimes people end up growing and deciding to leave, but most often, when people raise their own standards for how they're going to behave and what they do, their spouse actually can't help but respond in a different way. I sometimes think about this as the Velcro theory of relationships. If you have the fuzzy part and your partner has the sticky part and they come together, there you go.

But if one part is not there, if I don't have the fuzzy part -- You ever have Velcro that doesn't stick? The fuzzy part is just not there, and that's how I think about it. You have to not be the thing that the Velcro stick on and suddenly the situation is by definition it changes, that's how systems work. Systems respond to any change of any part. One part in the system changes, it changes the entire system. It's not magic.

You start to clean up a polluted river, it doesn't happen overnight but then there are fish down at the other end of the

river, some of the plants are starting to come back in, as you've just cleaned up one part of it. So that's really -- You're telling people, "Clean up your part and see what happens," and that to me, is beyond fair or unfair, that's just smart.

JORDAN: In the book, *It Takes One to Tango*, you mention that a lot of people might even go from relationship to relationship, essentially wondering why they can't get it right. "Oh, maybe this would be easier with somebody else and maybe I've chosen the wrong partner," and a lot of this stems from beliefs about relationships that a lot of people have backwards and one that stood out was that a lot of people think feeling close and connected is the same thing or it goes hand in hand with happiness, and it seems like you disagree with that. Can you tell us about that and tell us why?

WINIFRED: Yeah, people think, "What's a good relationship?" "Oh, we feel close, it's warm, we like each other, we're connected," and that is part of a relationship, that's actually quite lovely and sweet, but what makes a relationship vital, what keeps a relationship going is that people can't be seeking this kind of sameness that they had in courtship. That's a kind of sameness. There's a we-ness of courtship where's there's not really you and me as two separate unique individuals together, but in the early stages that's really lovely but as relationships go on, that sameness is sort of like being mashed together.

There's no distance, there's no perspective, you're not really standing solidly, you're not interesting, you can't really see someone when you're nose-to-nose that close up. That kind of hand-in-handness, it doesn't have enough range, it doesn't have flexibility to deal with, "What about when we're upset? What about when you don't like something that I'm doing? What about when we're disappointed?" This version of closeness gets people in trouble because it's hand in hand.

You have to take a stand, you have to be separate, you have to have a point of view, you have to have enough self, you have to be able to say, "This is what I think," and not be worried that it's

going to disturb the we-ness. People say, "Well I can't say that, he might leave me. We might break up." It's like people have to have enough of a solid sense of self in order to be connected. So, we think that relationships, marriage is about agreement and consensus and meeting halfway and compromising, but actually, all that need for consensus and validation, gets us into trouble. The bottom line is that if we want to be happy and healthy, we actually need to learn what to do when we disagree and we need to be able to do it effectively.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: So, what should we be doing here? Because I think a lot of people really want to avoid that because they feel like any sort of disagreement or a lack of sameness means that there's a problem inside the relationship itself.

WINIFRED: Yeah, and so we start out with this sameness. First of all, it's lovely when you meet someone, they're perfect, everything about them is wonderful, everybody knows all the hype about the limitations of the honeymoon stage.

But the next stage, where we give up that sameness and we take a step back and we start to acknowledge our differences, they're starting to emerge anyway. I ask people, "What's your first disillusionment in your relationship? What was the first time you thought maybe your partner wasn't perfect?" and that's the beginning of a growth point. If people can actually get through that where they start to embrace their differences, understand their differences, use them, battle with them, there's a kind of growth and flexibility and sturdiness that goes into relationships.

The only way for us to agree on everything, would be for one or both of us to be hiding how we truly feel. You just can't agree with another person about everything. And if we need the other person to validate that what we think or feel is okay, then we're dependent on their approval. But what happens when I need to say, "You know, you're shaming the kids and I'm really

uncomfortable with that. We need to talk about that," or, "I think we're spending too much money," and somebody says, "You spend more money," and they fight, and you say, "I want to look at this issue. I know it's a heated one. We need to talk. If you're not going to cut back your spending, I'm going to start," that these ways in which we're not hand in hand and if we were, we would never grow.

That growth comes from navigating our differences, learning to embrace them, tolerate them, work with them -- And so, intimacy actually comes about when you have enough of a separateness that you can move toward the other. That's what makes intimacy intimate. It's not that we're already mushed together, it's that I'm away from you in some way and I move toward. I open myself, I reveal myself, I say something, it's when we reveal ourselves to another, come what may. It's not, "Okay, look in my eyes." It's just somebody makes a move. That's what makes it interesting.

JORDAN: So you're not saying we need to give up the "It takes two" belief set because you want to carry the partner's dead weight, you're saying you're giving up the "It takes two to tango" belief set because one of you has to take the lead and it might as well be you because you're the only one that might actually do it.

WINIFRED: Yes, if you have the capability of doing it, then pull up your socks and go first. It's simple. If I'm able to see something, why would I not take a risk and say it, if I have a sense about something or I want something? "Let's move to the country. Let's have another kid." Somebody goes first. So, let that person be you. It's why not? Somebody always goes first. That's how anything changes. People in a committee don't simultaneously have an idea for what they want to do next, somebody says, "What do you say we trade the car in for an electric car? What do you say we downsize and start camping?" Somebody has an idea. If we need validation or we need agreement in order to do everything, nothing changes.

JORDAN: I love the idea that, of course, we need to train a sharp eye on our own behaviors, I think that's extremely important. We've

talked about that a lot on the show because that's a great place to start taking the lead, and I also think that your insight here was brilliant in that you need to be willing to tolerate the aloneness of saying what you think and feel, even if your partner disagrees. I see it in a lot of relationships and frankly I see it in a lot of other people's relationships as well as my own. It happens to a lot of people at different times and I think that when we take the lead we're often standing alone and that can be scary and so it scares people away from doing it, which of course let's the problem get worse.

WINIFRED:

Yeah, if you could see my hands, I would be holding up two hands parallel that if you're going to take a stand, you actually do need to be separate because you have to be on your own two feet, which makes you alone in that moment. You're not leaning on somebody when you say, "I think we have a debt problem," you're standing alone, and then you might get some blowback and then you're really standing alone.

These differences come up in big and small ways. Somebody wants to have another kid, somebody wants to go back to school, big things. They want to move, they have a relative who needs to come live with them, they want to start giving their sick mother money, these are things that are challenging. You have to be able to stand and there's an experience of being along. "I'm not being validated, you think I'm an idiot, you think my idea is dumb or you don't like it, it's scary," but we don't change anything by waiting for constant approval. I think about the early scientists. "The Earth is flat." "Well, I think the Earth is round." You take a lot of blowback. You have to be able to stand alone.

JORDAN:

Another concept that I loved in the book was that every relationship has its unspoken rules, many of which we are not aware of, and invisible scripts and things like that, they're one of my pet favorites because these exist in everything, from your career to the way that you eat and your exercise and your physical fitness and in inside your relationships. Every relationship has these unspoken rules, the interesting part

about these unspoken rules inside our relationship is that instead of the rules that we usually make with ourselves about fitness, and the way we eat, and blah, blah, blah, these relationships are made silently with our partner, oftentimes in action.

WINIFRED:

Yes, it's through inaction. It's based on avoidance. I like to illustrate it with this idea that -- Imagine that you and your new loved one are out drinking lattes in a cafe, planning your first romantic weekend away, and meanwhile, unbeknownst to you, and your representative and your partner's representative are hashing out the details about how are you going to live, and it's going to be, "Okay, fine, you don't have to like my best friend and I won't talk about how much pot you smoke, but you cannot ever confront my overspending and by no means can we ever talk about sex," and those things are hammered out and we don't know that they're there but they're hammered out because we got a sense that, "If I bring this up, he doesn't look so good." It's this collusive, lowest common denominator set of rules which then, they're inevitable.

So, I say to people, there's no avoiding it. It's just that, when you start to feel constrained, when you start to feel stuck, when you say things like, "She won't let me bring this up," or, "I can't talk about that," you're bumping into those rules and that's one of the big how to take the lead, the one to tango move, you start challenging the rules. Not allowed to talk about sex? Guess what, let's talk about sex. Not allowed to challenge that I still sleep with my stuffed animal? Go ahead, ask me the question. But just to challenge it.

These rules, they're there, they're constraining, they have to change in order for you to grow and sometimes I say to people. "What's the most constraining thing in your relationship?" and they'll come up with something which is one of these rules. "We can't ever talk about retirement," and so there's your step. Okay good, you want to start to change something? Go right there. I always tell people, "Pick the highest real estate. Go for it." The

thing that's going to give you the most action. You can start with a small thing too. Sometimes start with a big thing.

JORDAN: This is fascinating because I think a lot of people think, "We're the only ones who have this," or they go, "We don't have any of those," and then you sit down and you think about it and then you suddenly realize, "Uh-oh, I'm going into my journal here with the idea of I should write three of these down or something like that," and suddenly you find 10.

WINIFRED: And that would be great news because you just start changing them one at a time. You change five of them, your whole relationship is going to be different.

JORDAN: Yeah, the human brain, of course, designed to maintain the status-quo, maybe not make waves. We don't like to embrace the unknown or rock the boat, in many ways, especially when there's something that would require doing a lot of work in order to fix, and might not be smoothed out over lunch. It might not be as simple as saying, "Hey, you know, this thing that you do, I don't really like that," and the other person goes, "Okay, didn't know that." It could be, "Thanks for sharing." It could take weeks, you could be fighting over it for weeks and months, but it's better than a decade.

WINIFRED: "Thanks for sharing that, honey. How dare you say that? I can't believe you said that about me. I thought you loved me." Right. And the status-quo, it does not like the unknown, no matter how much of an adventurer you think you are, your brain is still back thinking that every little crack of a branch is a sabre toothed tiger coming after you. So, we react to these fairly ordinary situations in our life as if it's an emergency, whether or not we're truly in danger.

I had a client who had a mantra that I thought was terrific. It was that, he said that when he would start to get that whoosh in response to something his wife did, and he wanted to make some kind of move that was healthier, he would say to himself, "Okay, I might get hurt, but I'm not going to die," that we have to countermand that message that our brain says, "Better safe

than sorry. I'm going to hunker down. Come after me, I'm going to attack you. Come after me, I'm going to curl up into a ball." We have to go against that instinct for self preservation in order for us to grow.

JORDAN: One thing that I loved in the book was the discussion of how to figure out what you're really fighting about. A lot of people have the same fight over and over, whether it's every week or every three years. But the fights, they're almost always the same, they might just seem different on their face, but usually it's the underlying stuff is just boiling over again, but this time it's because somebody left the cap off the toothpaste. It's never about the toothpaste, right? So, how do we even get the lens focused on what is important here, instead of, "Man, she's always yelling at me about this damn toothpaste. What's the big deal?"

WINIFRED: That's right. "Why are you making such a big deal about the blah, blah, blah?" Exactly. So, basically, if we think about that there's the theme and the content, content does not matter in your fight. The content might even change but the fight stays the same. So, the language I'm going to use is little picture, that's the content, big picture, that's the actual theme -- the underlying content. What is really going on here? There are a handful of ways to do it.

One of them is you pause. You have to be able to get perspective in order to know what the big picture is. It's like looking at a mosaic. If your nose is up against the mosaic, you see some blue square, but you don't know if it's the ocean or the sky. You have to step all the way back. And then the questions you can ask are things like, "What is really going on here? What is fueling my reaction? What is setting me off?" The answers are not always so easy but that's where it begins. "What's really going on here? What's really going on is we're interrupting each other. What's really going on is I'm frustrated. What's really going on is both of us need to be right or I'll fight to the death and I'll never heal. What is actually going on with me?"

So then, you focus on your troublesome behaviors. "Do I comply too quickly? Do I dig in? Am I impossible? Am I interrupting?" Sometimes our troublesome behaviors are not offensive actions, sometimes they're ways in which inside we're saying, "I don't know what to do," or, "I'm not smart." Sometimes our troublesome behaviors have to do with the things we're afraid to do. So it's not always, "I'm not nice," or, "I don't care about this," or, "I'm disrespectful." Sometimes it's, "I comply too easily," or, "I carry a lot of resentment," or, "I give up." So, just to focus on your own troublesome behaviors, or for example, when the conflict over, was it really over or did you carry it around with you for a month, looking for more evidence for why you were right in that, carrying around a grudge. So, we have to look beyond the content to see what's going on.

Sometimes, when it's hard, I remind people there are two big things that can set off our big picture issues. One is this issue as I was talking before about differences, that it's very challenging to work with differences in a partnership. And so, we want our partner to want what we want, and agree with us, to see the world as we do and we want them to live the way we prefer, and when we can't get things to go the way we prefer, we fight. My question for people -- It's not so simple as, "So don't do that," it's more like, "So, what do I do when we encounter our differences? Why is it so hard for me to see that we don't agree?" A huge issue in the big bringing in politics in families, people are divided with their political beliefs in such an acute way right now, that families are breaking apart, and it's symbolic of people not being able to talk about differences, not being able to tolerate them, we just want to obliterate our differences. So, that's some of what can set off people's fights.

The struggle that you have with your differences, you can have beliefs like, "Well, the reason you leave the olive oil out and you don't put it away is because you're a dumbass," it's not like, "Why do I need so much control here?" "Oh, yeah, he needs to do it his way, I need to do it -- And we're on a one lane bridge, Oh, I see. We're constantly having our one lane bridge fight where nobody is willing to move. Okay good, so it doesn't matter what

the content is. I'm going to fight you. Keep it on the counter, put it away, turn the toilet paper around." And so, the big picture issue there is, "Why do I have to have everything my way and why do we lock horns about this?" The other thing that feeds into it is our emotional baggage, our past, our issues, yeah.

JORDAN: "My brother picked on me as a kid for this and now you're doing the same thing," and they're like, "What are you talking about?"

WINIFRED: "And I can't stand it and I'm going to kill you for it." Yeah, exactly. Or, "Nobody ever listened to me." One of the big tip offs is if we're saying, "Always," and, "Never," that gives me a sense of, "Okay, this has got to have some heft to it." It's always, "You never listen to me," and my question to people is, "Okay, if we go back, were you perfectly listened to as a child?" "No, nobody listened to me." "Okay, guess what? You're still fighting the same battle. You're fighting the battle you lost as a child and you think you're going to win it with your spouse."

And so those are some of the things that fuel our fights. And so calling the issues by the correct name-- "Oh, yeah, we're fighting about trust here, Oh, yeah, we're fighting about power and control. Oh, we're fighting about commitment." "You give up, you walk out." "Oh, okay, we're having a fight about commitment." To know what is actually going on, you actually have to be calling it by its right name.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: This is important, I want to highlight that. I am so guilty of this too. I'll be mad about something completely different, not even really knowing why anybody is mad about anything -- This definitely comes from the way I was raised because my dad was like this too. He was the king of bringing home work stress and then you're like, "Why is he so mad about the orange juice?"

WINIFRED: Yeah, it's that tipping point. You live at that tipping point, exactly.

JORDAN: If he had been able and educated in this, to just sit down and go, "Oh, we're mad about the fact that my home is the only place that I feel like it should have some calm and since it doesn't, I feel like I'm still at work. I can leave never leave work," he probably would have gone, "This has nothing to do with the orange juice and it certainly doesn't have anything to do with my kid or my family."

WINIFRED: That's right. We have lots of stuff going on inside of ourselves and sometimes I think people are a fight looking for something to pick itself on.

JORDAN: Oh, interesting. Right, like I have the fight ready and I've got the emotions going --

WINIFRED: So, whoever crosses my path, boom.

JORDAN: Right, it's like running your hand along a piece of wood and you're just like, "I'm trying to get a sliver, and this thing is so smooth. Ah, there's one. On of a gun. Right, yeah, good. Now I can get upset and yell at people."

WINIFRED: Perfect, yeah. There's a lot that goes on in relationships and so we're led by our feelings. Our brain is set up in an interesting way. If you imagine the feeling part of your brain as being more well exercised, stronger than the part of your brain that has reason.

So, imagine that for every emotion you have you get this whoosh and let's say it's like a tunnel, or maybe there's 40 tunnels of feeling that go to your thinking brain and then your thinking brain is standing there going, "Wait a minute, let's be reasonable here," it just gets flooded out. We have to practice engaging that little part, the thinking part of our brain that can say, "Hold on a minute. What's really going on here? Why am I acting like this? I'm a grown up, why am I acting like a child? I'm yelling. Why do I need to yell?"

There's this step back. "What's going on here? Oh, I feel powerless. Oh, I'm anxious. Oh, I feel like I'm losing control here. Oh, somebody is doing something I don't prefer." We have to be able to see that stuff.

JORDAN: One of the practicals we talked about prior to the show was there really is no denying that some of our own less than stellar behaviors are responsible for creating some of the problems we see and experience inside our relationships. So, we have to identify something that would make a positive difference. Let's talk about making positive changes. Look, we look at our idea that maybe I'm stingy or maybe I'm the first one to jump and criticize. It's almost like I'm looking for something, hypothetically. Maybe it's someone's passivity or the hit and run, I'm going to say something and then quickly go to the gym so that nobody can get a word in. There's all kinds of stuff here and I almost don't know what to do with it. Where do we start? Do I examine my own behavior? I'm going to have a laundry list. There's not enough paper in the house for me to write down everything.

WINIFRED: That's right, so the good news is, you start with one thing and you pick one thing that you have some investment in because you're going to have to be working against your old habits. So, what I picked for myself, the first thing, once I did the process of observing all of my not so fabulous behaviors, was what I needed to be able to do was to be able to think under pressure. That thing I was talking about where you get flooded with emotion and the little thinking -- Your prefrontal cortex, that poorly developed part of ourselves, part of brain --

I decided I was going to do whatever I could to engage that in the midst of a conflict with my husband because he's a master arguer and I would lose my train of thought and I would be saying, "Wait, how are we talking about --" and then I just would feel exasperated and then I would just start yelling because I felt so completely blitzed in my brain.

And so, that was all I focused on, "How am I going to maintain my thinking under pressure in conflict with my husband?" and I worked on it and worked on it and it really began to change everything. So, you just need to pick one thing.

Let's say what you realize is that you throw up your hands the minute your partner says, "Could we talk about something? Oh, don't start with me," and then your spouse goes nuts. That's a good thing to change. What would the alternative to that be? Everybody knows that they do something that's not so great and so find that thing, and come up with an alternative to that. It's scary or weird. You might be saying, "Yeah, but this isn't the real problem. The real problem is something else."

Pick one problem. You might have that long list but you'd be surprised because as you start to change your behaviors, what you're really learning is how to be accountable and you're going to start to be accountable in more ways. It sort of translates across the board. So, you start with changing one thing and so if you really don't know what to pick, just watch yourself in action, and think, "Okay, what are the things that I do that really support good things going on in my relationship? And what are the things that I do that muck it up?" And when you see some of the stuff that mucks it up, that's where to go to pick one thing.

JORDAN: That's great. So even if we think, "Well I'm not the one who mucks it up but when I do this, then they get triggered," you could just change that as well. Because we're really looking for maybe triggers. Because a lot of people might go, "I don't do anything that mucks up my relationship, it's all Jordan. That guy has got issues."

WINIFRED: Exactly. Once you get past that, find something. I suspect even the Dalai Lama will self reflect and decide, "Oh, I'm not being generous enough," you know? You can find something. It doesn't matter if your partner has a list that wraps around the entire circumference of the planet Earth, you pick one thing, focus on changing yourself. It's not necessarily clear how to do it, so for me, it was practice. I say that, really one of the keys to

this is to try something and it fails and then try something else and it fails. Fail seven times, fall seven times, stand up eight. Just keep practicing. You get stronger and clearer, you hone your skills. If you pick the thing like, "What I'm going to do to have a better relationship is make the bed," fine, make the bed every day. Don't ask for praise, see what happens. If you want to start really small, make the bed.

JORDAN:

You mentioned that you are a therapist and you worked on this stuff with your husband. Did you work on this stuff with your husband while you were a therapist? And also, is he a master arguer because you're so knowledgeable on this? He really has no choice but to pull all kinds of gymnastics in order to get out of anything.

WINIFRED:

We came into it sort of like a couple of kids. And I would say that we fought more like siblings when we were in the early part of our marriage. My husband is a bright guy. He is a master arguer but the thing about arguers is that most of the time, they just take whatever you say and kind of throw it back in your face or throw it up in the air. It's not exactly admirable to be able to argue and go in circles with your partner. But yes, I did this.

I wasn't a therapist when I first got married, I was in school. But, one of the jokes is that you should never marry a therapist because it's like being in residential treatment. I was learning how to be an effective couples therapist alongside learning how to be an effective spouse. So, I would bring home these materials. "Hey look, this is an interesting idea." He didn't buy -- particularly the piece about how being separate leads to closeness.

That was the biggest challenge for him and I think that that can be challenging for others and so he was skeptical. So what I did was, I just got myself a little more psychologically separate so that I could begin to focus on myself and work on my part of things and what happened is that eventually, unbeknownst to me, I wasn't really watching what he was doing, he was actually developing a much clearer sense of himself, and he began to

participate. At some point down the road, he was actually on board with changing our marriage. That's why the subtitle has 'almost' in parentheses.

JORDAN: With (almost) no Help From Him. Because at the end of the day, he really was. He maybe just needed a little bit of coaxing.

WINIFRED: I needed to take the lead. Someone needed to start. It's like you start to clean something up and then when it gets cleaner and clearer, it's just easier to go with it. It made sense to him. And so initially, it didn't make sense. When it started to give us a better life, it made a lot of sense and so he was on board.

JORDAN: Last but definitely not least, you have the 'What's true' exercise here and this is a very solid practical which we're all about here on The Art of Charm. Using this would take any conflict and maybe deescalate it a little bit or possibly show so much vulnerability and willingness to work things out. It could let all the steam out of a potentially explosive situation.

WINIFRED: Yeah, it definitely works in both of those ways. The 'What's true' exercise is fairly simple. People say, "We're having this fight. I'm so frustrated. I don't know what to say. I feel like we've been here before. I don't even know what this is about. It makes me just want to just cry," and I say, "Good, start with that." They've just listed what's true. It doesn't have any B.S. in it, it doesn't have -- there's no hiding in there, and so you start with that. "Okay, I'm really frustrated. I wish we didn't have this fight over and over again. When we do, it makes me feel like crying. I don't know what to do, do you have any ideas? This is driving me crazy."

And you're already -- you have transcended the content. It is the perfect doorway out of the content of your fight. You're going big picture. You're talking about the process, you're talking about the context of the fight, and so you just go through what's true. "I'm afraid I'm going to start yelling. My fear is making me shut down." Just go inside and all that little voice in your head stuff, you start by saying it. It changes the

game completely because you're actually talking about what's going on. You don't even have to think. You already know all that stuff. "I'd like to scream. I'd like to hit you over the head with a frying pan. I can't take this anymore." Fine, start with all that.

JORDAN: I use some sort of accidental variation of this technique, not that I've figured it out. But I think when I come down to being so frustrated, rather than explode like my dad used to, back in the day, it's a relief -- it's sort of this cathartic relief -- to say, "All right, I don't know what's happening here. Here's my truth without emotion in it," almost like, "I'm tired of fighting. Here's what's in my head," and the other person in the situation, usually my wife, on the rare occasion when this does escalate to this particular part, often she goes, "Yeah, you know, I just X, Y, Z, A, B, C, D," and I remember having this happen and go, "Oh, man, next time we do this, we need to go straight to this phase of everything because it's so nice," and she's like, "Yeah." And then of course, we don't.

WINIFRED: Okay, but that's great. That's perfect, because then what I would say is, the more you practice it, the shorter the time lag. So you go into hotel crazy, you go around and around, you look in a bunch of rooms, and then you say, "Wait a minute, this is really not working." So, that's just terrific.

JORDAN: "Yeah, we've been here before. Last time we said we needed to skip to phase three and we went through the first two anyway, what's wrong with us?" and I find myself repeating that. But you're right, I think if we do become aware of it, it's like meditation, it just gets easier and easier over time.

WINIFRED: And more automatic.

JORDAN: And more automatic. And then, the trick, of course, would be before you get emotional at all, you go, "Hmm, okay there'd be this emotion. Oh, okay, all right. Yeah, here's what's in my head now," and I can do that, unfortunately, when the emotions are not that strong. If the emotions are strong, then I'm screwed.

WINIFRED: Yeah, but here's the good news. Because when the emotions are strong, then it's just going to take a few more seconds. So, you get the whoosh, you have the whole thing, you go through your automatic stuff, and then the exercises you've done to grab ahold of your neocortex, you come in and you say, "Okay, wait a minute." I like to say no matter how far you have gone down the wrong road, you can turn around.

JORDAN: Winifred, thank you so much. There's a lot here. I hope this is helping the folks that are listening as much as I'm enjoying having this conversation and you'll definitely be back.

WINIFRED: It's really been absolutely a pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

JORDAN: All right, great big thank you to Winifred Reilly. The book title is *It Takes One to Tango: How I Rescued My Marriage with (Almost) No Help from My Spouse and How You Can, Too*. She's going to be back for sure. If you enjoyed this one, don't forget to thank Winifred on Twitter. We'll have that linked in the show notes. And I'd love for you to tweet at me your number one takeaway from Winifred. I'm @theartofcharm on Twitter.

You can, of course, find the show notes for this episode at theartofcharm.com/podcast and if you want to start applying the things you're learning on the show but you're thinking, "Oh, gosh, what do I do?" or you're doing that already but you want a more structured way to go about it, we've got the solution. You're speaking my language. Theartofcharm.com/challenge is where you can find our challenge and it's about improving your networking and connection skills, using the skills you learn on the show, it's free, a lot of people seem to not know that somehow.

It's free, that's the whole point. It's a fun way to start the ball rolling, get some forward momentum, apply the things you are learning on the show to your life here, every day. We'll also send you our fundamentals Toolbox, that I mentioned earlier on the

show. That includes some great practical stuff, ready to apply, as soon as you hear it. Reading body language, having that charismatic nonverbal communication, the science of attraction and charisma, things like negotiation, networking strategies, influence and persuasion tactics, everything else that you're used to hearing here on The Art of Charm on the show and that you would learn at our live programs here in L.A. at The Art of Charm. This stuff will make you a better networker, a better connector, and it will certainly make you a better thinker. There's so much here. It's really fun to be in this group and to do this stuff and it's a minimal time commitment. So quit crying, go to theartofcharm.com/challenge or text 'AoC' to the number 38470.

This episode of AoC was produced by Jason DeFillippo, Jason Sanderson is our audio engineer and editor and the show notes on the website are by Robert Fogarty. The theme music right now is by Little People, transcriptions are by TranscriptionOutsourcing.net, I'm your host Jordan Harbinger -- If you can think of anyone who might benefit from the episode you've just heard, please pay AoC the highest compliment and you might even save their marriage. Pay it forward by sharing this episode with them. It only takes a moment and great ideas are meant to be shared. And you never know, you could make all the difference in someone's life and their marriage. So, share the show with your friends and enemies, stay charming, and leave everything and everyone better than you found them.

