

*First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 2*

Episode Transcript: Maddy Kucera on “Cultivating Self-Awareness and Integrity”

Hello, and welcome to *First Year Writing Seminar The Podcast* where we hear from different people who speak on certain events in their life that have led them to a certain conclusion. On today’s episode, we’ll hear from Maddy Kucera, a first year student at Cottey college who is going to be discussing her experience with hitting rock bottom, and what self-efficacy and motivation have to do with the world we live in individually and as a group. I do want to put in a quick little trigger warning. Today’s guest will be speaking about eating disorders in graphic detail, and if that’s something that could potentially be destructive to you, I urge you to listen to a different episode. With that being said, please enjoy the following listening.

Hi! I’m Maddy Kucera. I’m a first year student at Cottey College studying secondary education. In our first year writing seminar, we were challenged with the task of deciding what we believe in, and chalking all of it up to one statement using one of four dimensions talking about global awareness. I believe that dimension one, which talks about self-awareness and integrity, is most important in our ability to be globally aware, and that you must first experience your individual lowest low to fully understand how strong you are and the impact you can have on others.

To begin with, you have to be well physically and mentally before you can even approach trying to be there emotionally for someone else. I mentioned in the beginning of the podcast that I was a first year student in college. I’m also a sister, daughter, friend, and employee. I’m also a recovering anorexic and bulimic. Anorexia is an eating disorder that is characterized by restricting what one eats to a point where it’s harmful. Bulimia is characterized by any eating behavior that is followed by a “purge”, or a way to rid oneself of that meal or food item, including induced vomiting, excessive exercise, or laxative abuse. I began a cycle of destructive eating patterns when I was fourteen, and as I got older, I progressively got more drastic in my hunger to lose weight and achieve perfection and control. Along this road, I lost a lot more than just pounds. I lost my menstrual cycle, some of my hair, my sleep, my sanity, my ability to maintain body heat, and most of all, my grip on reality. I was so hyper focused on making sure I didn’t gain weight, eat anything, or slip up that everything that used to matter didn’t anymore. I replaced any friends I could’ve had with a scale in a bathroom, and instead of friendship bracelets and class rings adorning my hands, scabs and cuts lined my knuckles from purging. During this time, one thing became very clear. My relationship with myself was extremely unhealthy. I was in no position to help myself, let alone anyone else. Asking for help and having someone step in and give you a hand is necessary sometimes, and that’s not an easy conclusion to come to. When talking about dimension one, this concept is extremely applicable. Character traits that stick out to me when thinking about my experiences with eating disorders are dependability and self-awareness. In order to help someone else, whether the problem is big or small, you must be someone dependable at every step. If you can’t depend on yourself to sustain a healthy lifestyle by eating meals and taking care of yourself, you aren’t able to give

that to someone else. Being self-aware enough to know you need help also allows you a better insight as to when other people might need your help.

Continuing, your experiences and challenges fundamentally change the way you look at the people around you, and your perspective is what motivates you to take action. (First day in the treatment office vs last day) I remember walking into the children's behavioral health office for the first time and feeling completely floored. Across a waiting room of colorful books and monotone voices, there were kids who looked nothing like I did. Kids of all sizes, ages, and backgrounds all had one thing in common. At first, I hated this waiting room. I didn't wanna be grouped in with the kids everyone is afraid of or can't understand unless they have a master's degree. I wasn't anything like them, and to categorize me as needing help or being crazy wasn't fair. The trait of honesty plays a big part in dimension one when speaking about global awareness. There are many reasons we lie to ourselves. The main one for me was the truth was too painful, shocking, or sometimes, altogether too heavy. By being honest, you're able to cultivate a real relationship with the world and those who inhabit it. How often do we walk past someone on the street without knowing anything about where they came from or what they do? To us, they're a roadblock, a distraction. And if I was honest with myself, they were pieces of myself that I couldn't even put into words yet. As my time in treatment continued, I kept seeing the same faces. I felt myself begin to change in my own head. As I began the hard work of being honest about what my eating disorder did for me, I started to realize the similarities between me and the kids in the waiting room. All of a sudden, the kid who was so thin she couldn't wear leggings or the five year old who wouldn't speak weren't side characters anymore. They were bits of information that I was able to use to get better. In order to serve a bigger purpose in the world, we have to begin looking at ourselves for what we are and looking at other people for what they are. Lying to yourself about your situation, eating disorder or not, gives you no room to change the world or make even a little bit of difference. Dimension one places emphasis on understanding that your experiences and struggles are not what make you imperfect, but rather what make you. As you continue through life trying to figure out a million things at once, being honest about how you feel and why you feel that way is the gateway to ultimate success in other areas of our lives, such as careers, relationships, or academics.

Finally, you have to understand how much you're worth in order to bring out the worth in other's/ idea of needing to hit rock bottom in order to help others when they hit rock bottom. In order to truly understand how to be globally aware and help others achieve great things, an understanding of rock bottom is needed. Rock bottom isn't the end, just a new redirection. My rock bottom was lying on the bathroom floor in my house at 2 am. I was so dehydrated that I couldn't stand up, but every time I tried to be sick, there was nothing to throw up in my stomach. My throat was raw and bloody from the constant stomach acid damaging my esophagus. All I could do was cry, and even that was miniscule as I had barely anything to make tears in me. In just a t-shirt, I crawled to my room and found an old granola bar which I quickly snarfed down so I could finally throw up. This moment was the first moment in this entire ordeal I had ever looked at my eating disorder and thought 'What the hell are we doing?' And it was only for a second, but somehow it meant more than just a few words to me. Rock bottom is what you make it. At my lowest, I had to find help from somewhere other than myself. But in

order to do that, I had to take accountability for what was happening to me. That doesn't mean the eating disorders were my fault. It means that keeping them a secret and defending them was my fault. Accountability is a big part of dimension one, and in order to understand the world around us, we must understand our part in it. Much like understanding what I was contributing to my anorexia and bulimia, we must understand what we as individuals contribute to an issue. For example, if I'm passionate about climate change or environmental activism, the very first step of making a change is making myself change. Whether it be reducing animal and plastic intake or recycling more, change starts with one person. In order to truly recover or pick yourself up, you have to acknowledge the role you play in your own circumstance much like the roles we play in our own world. I also believe rock bottom moments help us motivate ourselves. In dimension one, motivation is an important characteristic because it explains why we strive to make the changes we do. That moment on the bathroom floor was one of many precursors that told me that I had to change something or I wasn't going to make it. Much like different movements throughout history such as the civil rights movement and the women's suffrage movement, sometimes things have to get to their worst for you to realize what you have to do to fix the situation at hand.

To sum up why I'm talking to you, I want to again reiterate the importance of self-awareness and integrity. I believe that dimension one, which talks about self-awareness and integrity, is most important in our ability to be globally aware, and that you must first experience your individual lowest low to fully understand how strong you are and the impact you can have on others. In order to be globally aware, you must first be self-aware of your needs, ambitions, fears, and attitudes towards a plethora of different issues. What I believe in is what I talked about today in this podcast, but it's also what I will keep in my head as I make decisions that affect the rest of the world.