



First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 5
Cottey College

Episode Transcript: Claire Lindstrom on “Leadership Concerns All of Us”

Listening is Leadership

Podcast host: Welcome to this episode of season five of the ‘This I Believe’ podcast. I’m Asya Bishop-Flores, a Cottey College student and your host today. Special guest, Claire Lindstrom, will be joining us on the topic of leadership. She is a first-year student at Cottey College and is excited to share examples of leadership from her own life. Please join me in welcoming her today.

[clapping sound]

Claire Lindstrom: Thank you, Asya, for your kind introduction. As you mentioned, I’ll be talking about leadership today. When we think of a leader, we often think of those in charge: the president, the governor, or perhaps your boss or the principal of your school. However, I believe “leadership concerns all of us” (First-Year Writing Seminar 2). There is not a single person out there whose experiences cannot be used have a positive impact on the world.

A story I like to share is from this summer. “Where’s my redheaded friend in a wheelchair?” exclaimed Lyla, a four-year-old little girl I met who also happens to be in a wheelchair. I had the honor and privilege of helping lead the singing and dancing at Vacation Bible School or VBS this year – it’s a weeklong summer camp for preschool and elementary age children, where kids learn about God in a fun environment – and, by the end of the week, I had Lyla up there spinning around in her wheelchair and doing all the dance moves with me in our bright blue and green VBS-themed t-shirts. Before VBS this year, I prayed that there be someone else in a wheelchair and Lyla is the answer to that prayer! Throughout the summer, I had several more opportunities to hang out with Lyla and her family. They came to Faith Riders, a biking event during summer evenings at church where kids bike around the parking lot while the adults sit back and relax in lawn chairs as the sun goes down. Lyla and I can’t bike, but we sure can race down the hill side-by-side in our wheelchairs hooting and hollering as we go. We also got to go to camp together and one of my biggest highlights from that week was getting to see Lyla singing her heart out to “Let it Go,” as she spun around in her wheelchair all decked out with paper snowflakes. A couple weeks ago, I got a handmade card from Lyla in the mail. Apparently, she misses me so much that she talks about me every day. So, however small my role may have been at VBS, Lyla reminded me that anyone can be a leader. I didn’t have to be the pastor or main group leader to build Lyla’s confidence to get singing, dancing, and racing down the parking lot. Everyone can be a leader without holding an official leadership position in their lives if their actions reflect the confidence of a leader.

Another time from my life that shows anybody can use their experiences to have a positive impact on the world stems from an online support group I joined about four years ago for people with medical devices related to chronic digestive system issues. Most of the group consists of members who are 65 or older and I love to hear about all their travels around the world. They have made it clear to me that with extra planning, it's absolutely possible for me to travel to another country. I am still a part of this wonderful, lively group today, but being a teenager, I longed to interact with peers who are going through similar health challenges of their own. This is what prompted me to found my own support group for teens who use alternative nutrition for medical reasons. It took years to get the group going with several hurdles because I was under 18 at the time, but it was absolutely worth it once the group took off. I am still in contact with all the original members and two of us have now successfully started college. These people understand what I've been through better than anyone else. We can laugh and talk about the challenges of living with chronic illness in a way you can't with someone who hasn't been through the same thing. The back-and-forth texts about applying for disability or talking about the transition from pediatric doctors to adult ones. We felt like we were exaggerating in our college essays, but we were not. It all actually happened. We understand the medical supplies that take up an entire dresser and all the space under our beds in our dorms or preparing what to say to professors or new classmates as we started college. Being able to connect with people through your experiences is one of the strongest ways leadership concerns all of us. The people I've met through these support groups have inspired me and I, in turn, have inspired them. This is leadership.

Finally, I got to experience another example of how leadership concerns all of us very recently. I moved to Nevada this fall to start college at Cottey. Something that was very important to me was that I found a church right away. I did some research before I moved, and even visited the church I'd selected with my family the weekend I moved into my dorm. The people are so kind and welcomed me with open arms. I don't even mind that most Sundays I am the only Cottey student there. Unfortunately, it has been a very difficult time for this community. Just weeks after I started attending, the pastor's wife passed away after a very long, hard five-year health battle. When I found out this news, I reached out to the pastor and gave him my condolences and also let him know that if he ever needed somebody to talk to, I'd be there. I was shocked when he actually took me up on the offer and we have had several conversations since. I've enjoyed our conversations from the quiet of my dorm room on Friday evenings with the lights dim and my twinkle lights fading between pastel colors in the corner. [music starts] It is in these quiet moments when I can lend a listening ear that I know what leadership is. It's connecting with those around you and knowing how to be there for others. It extends to people of all ages and walks of life. It's a way we can all make a difference in the world.

Ultimately, everyone can, and will, have an impact on those around them. There is a child who looks up to you, someone your age that you have similar experiences to that you can connect with, and a person in authority in your life who may just need you to be that person who lets them know you're there for them. So, let's come together and be positive leaders.

Podcast host: Thank you for your insight, Claire. It was pleasure to have you on our show today.

[clapping sound and then music ends]

Works Cited

First-Year Writing Seminar (FWS 101). "First-Year Writing Seminar's Five Foundational Principles for Leadership," Cottey College, 2023.

Sound Attributions

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