



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

Episode Transcript: Presley Swindell on “The Leadership Process is Dynamic and Context-Specific”

Hello and welcome to season 5 of First Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast. Today we have special guest, Presley Swindell, here to talk about leadership. Presley is a freshman taking the first-year writing seminar course at Cottey College. In this episode, Presley will talk us through her belief that leadership isn’t defined by just one thing, along with her personal experiences.

Hi everyone! So, jumping right in, I believe that leadership is dynamic and context specific. When we think of leadership, we most often think about a person in power or someone that is in charge of a large group of people. Defining leadership in one sentence is impossible. Parents, team captains, politicians, teachers, and coaches are all leaders in their own ways. Yet, not one has the same role as the other.

The biggest leader in MY life is my grandpa. If you saw my papa the last thing you would think is that he is a leader. He’s got busted up hands, worn boots, dirty jeans and an old ball cap on most of the time. He’s not a world changer or some big-name activist. He’s my papa and he’s built me to be the person I am today. He doesn’t care for the talk of the world; he doesn’t even own a phone. The biggest thing he has shown me is that if I want something, forget what others are saying, forget any doubt you have, forget it all, and go do it. The rest will work itself out. To others this may be controversial. Some may say that’s irresponsible or just flat out dumb to think like that.

Going to college was a really hard decision for me. The night before I left my brain filled with every doubt and negative feeling it could. Am I smart enough? Am I good enough to play college basketball? How am I supposed to leave my family? Should I just stay here? I went to the one person I knew would have the answer. My papa. When I pulled in the driveway, he was sitting on the porch waiting for me. With tears in my eyes, I fell into his arms and told him that I didn’t think I could do it. I wasn’t strong enough to go to college. He picked up my head, wiped away my tears, and said, “What’s the worst that’ll happen?” I stopped and just looked at him. Why would he ask me that right now? He looked at me waiting for an answer that I didn’t have. “No, seriously what is the worst thing that can happen? You decide you don’t want to do it and come back home?” I nodded my head in agreement. He said, “I’ll always be here waiting on you. Whether you go and be the best at college or only make it one semester, I’ll be here when you come back ready to hear everything, but you won’t have anything to tell if you don’t try.” This was huge for me. No matter how nervous I was I always had full trust in him to have my back. I knew he would lead me in the right direction, even when the direction isn’t as simple as left or right.

The best way I can describe leadership is, “a responsibility to see those around us rise.” But that will always look different depending on the situation, right?

To be a good leader, you must know when to lead and make a decision. But also, when to adjust the decision to be able to move forward. Leaders are always dynamically evolving. The intensity of the situation demands different reactions and applications from a leader. You wouldn't apply the same leadership principles to a girls' basketball team as you would to a group of marines. So, leadership is dynamic and context specific. You have to factor in the circumstances, and the needs of a specific situation. Along with being able to adjust and adapt to the scenario. The two go hand and hand.

Circling back to my papa, his leadership role in MY life has made a huge impact on who I am today. To other people, he may seem like an “average Joe” or just not the leader type. That's because his leadership role really only applies to the context of my life, and I'm sure there are people out there that could say the same about someone in their life. The context of the situation and the ability of the leader to be dynamic are two of the defining features of leadership style.

If you've made it this far, I just want to take a moment to thank you for listening all the way through and to express my gratitude for following an episode of First Year Writing: The Podcast. I hope you enjoyed this discussion on leadership. If you would like to listen more about leadership, I encourage you to check out the other episodes in season five.

Sound Attributions

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