



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

Episode Transcript: Talia Jada on “The Leadership Process Begins with Knowing Yourself”

I believe that effective leadership begins with knowing yourself.

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Welcome back to the I believe podcast, where sturdy statements keep the wheels spinning! Join us today with Cottey College Freshman, Talia Jada, as we explore the core principle of self-awareness, and why it is a fundamental pillar to successful leadership.

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What does it mean to know yourself? It seems as if I’ve grappled with this question throughout all of my sleeping, and waking hours; and funnily enough, I’ve frequently fallen victim to believing that I’ve found the answer to this nebulous question. To know yourself is to accept that you exist in a perpetual state of change. There will always be an ever evolving version of yourself, so launching on that never ending pursuit (of trying to capture a particular version of yourself) is quite pointless when you think about it. We are dynamic and fluid creatures. Peer closer on a biological level, and you’ll also notice that we’re even different beings every day. Knowing yourself does not equate to limiting yourself, or acquiring labels to make yourself digestible to the world. So why is this relevant in the context of leadership, and giving back to your community? It's important because when you know yourself, you know the world.

Knowing how you most effectively walk through life, is just a good thing to have under your belt. It helps you develop clearer communication skills, supports your unique learning styles, and overall, makes you a more trustworthy and authentic person. This way, it’s easier to accomplish tasks, and override any forms of confusion. Developing a conscious awareness of these traits, will make you a more efficient advocate for both yourself and others. On the other hand, readily navigating your days like a lost puppy, and simultaneously expecting People to follow in your steps, is nothing but delusional; and quite frankly egotistical. Leadership is a collaborative dynamic. When you know yourself you make it much easier for the team in the long run. It's generally a good thing to discover things about yourself, but this also applies to overestimating your competence. Knowing oneself aids in the development of empathy which is acquired through experiential means, rather than taught in a traditional institutional setting (encased by four walls and harsh clinical lighting—caffeine replacement). People can sense the lack of introspection which you carry, because it's often compensated by hubris and a sense of arrogance.

music fades in then fades out

Summer of 2023 was ending, and I was counting down the days like a ticking time bomb, hoping some inspiration would strike me.

At my high school, every senior is required to deliver a presentation in front of the entire school, in order to graduate. The contents of this presentation can be about anything you wish, so long as it includes some degree of insight, towards your personal growth or passions. At this point I had watched 3 years' worth of these presentations, and have been gathering their formulaic structure in my brain, like an Ikea manual. They often came in three categories: work experience, interactive slideshows (which really just distracted the audience from revealing any vulnerable information) or untimely deaths (which were really awkward for the audience). Students had come up with the most creative topics to relate back to themselves, and I had just felt stuck with finding anything interesting about myself.

I had decided that I would volunteer for the earliest presentation date possible in order to get it over with. I received an email the last day of my Junior year, containing the date of my presentation, and that I would be the second person to present. The topic I decided to present about was my love for books, reading, and how they have shaped my outlook on the world. I glared at my speech on paper, and the contents seemed more personal than I remembered. Suddenly I was unsure if I wanted to share this part of myself with my community. I concluded my presentation by leading a story time with the senior class, and inviting them on stage. The book that I read was *Where the Wild Things Are*, which was the first complete book I read, at the age of three. My mother had always encouraged me to keep reading as a tool of self-empowerment and education. The presentation concluded with an eerie gap of silence.

I had started to wonder if I followed the formula incorrectly.

At the end of my presentation, a faculty member had approached me and said: "that was the best presentation I've watched in my 20 years of teaching here, thank you for setting that leadership example to our underclassmen".

Transition music

The Dunning Kruger effect describes a cognitive bias where individuals with limited abilities overestimate their knowledge and/or skills. The overall effect of this bias tends to lead to an overall sense of mistrust within groups, and unhealthy working conditions (Pilat, Krustev). I mention this because individuals can tell when a defective leader refuses to authentically accept accountability. The role of the leader is important, because they have to have the important skills of summary, synthesis, and having everyone's best interest in mind. You have to instinctively know what the best way to guide a diverse group is. And this simply cannot be achieved through a self-absorbed attitude, without actually doing the internal work. This effect

can also work in its inverse, where individuals will tend to underestimate their capabilities. And this is I believe, is why knowing oneself is the most important leadership principle

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Works Cited:

Pilat, Dan, and Sekoul Krastev. "Dunning–Kruger Effect." *The Decision Lab*, thedecisionlab.com/biases/dunning-kruger-effect. Accessed 19 Oct. 2024.