



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 61: KELLY CRACE – FLOURISHING IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

Phil Wagner

Hello from the halls of the Mason School of Business here at William & Mary. I'm Phil, and this is Diversity Goes to Work. Buckle up because we're getting ready to take a deep dive into the real human lived experiences that shape and guide our diversity work in the world of work. Should be fun.

Phil Wagner

Welcome, listeners, to yet another episode of Diversity Goes to Work. As we record our episode today, it's a rainy day outside, but I have a lot of joy in my heart because I get to sit down and have a fun, casual, hope-filled conversation with a friend and someone I respect dearly. Kelly Crace is William & Mary's Associate Vice President for Health and Wellness. He's also the Director of the Center for Mindfulness and Authentic Excellence. He's a licensed psychologist, and he's co-author of a book that has rocked my world, rocked the world of my faculty colleagues and our students. That book is *Authentic Excellence: Flourishing and Resilience in a Relentless World*, and also the *Life Values Inventory*. I want to talk about that flourishing work today because, indeed, this feels like a relentless world. We're in the middle of our first arc of the season, looking at how we find belonging in the midst of a context that seems to incentivize division and polarization. So today, we're going to talk about those values that guide us. Kelly, thanks for joining us. We know that William & Mary has several values that guide our approach. Let's start first with belonging, because that's one of those that we've spoken at length about on this podcast. Excellence is another, service another, curiosity, integrity, respect. But all of those lead somewhere, and that's to a value that I want to explore today, which is flourishing. That doesn't really feel possible right now. You've done a lot of work in this area. Let's first conceptualize, what does that even mean? What is flourishing, and what role does that play in our leadership ethos?

Kelly Crace

Thanks, Phil. It's a great question. Also, just wanted to thank you for the honor and the joy of being able to spend a little bit of time with you in conversation today. You're right. It is a rainy day, but there's nothing like a little liquid sunshine to bring some joy in your heart and being able to spend some time with a good friend. So thank you for that. And thank you for the honor of inviting me to be a part of this podcast. It's a wonderful podcast that is contemplative. It allows us to think a little more deeply and, in that thinking, hopefully, connect with each other a little more deeply. So, thank you for offering this opportunity. I'm

so glad you brought up the aspect of how you think about flourishing, because in today's time of just increased absurdity, increased relentlessness, increased uncertainty in our world, the concept of flourishing just feels a little hollow, and it feels a little unattainable. And that's largely because of how society has connoted the term flourishing. In today's time, this has been my life's work, Phil, and I'm even tired of the term for how it's been distorted and used in a way that is not how it was intended. It really is flourishing today. It has this notion that flourishing is that I'm just always at my best, that I'm happy all the time, and I'm not affected by the world around me when actually that's not what flourishing is. Flourishing is actually while affected by the world around me. How do I healthily engage in the things that matter to me, and how do I healthfully find a level of health and wellness in my life that sustains me amidst this absurdity? So flourishing is one of these terms of really it's while being effective, how do I hold on and step in and engage and show up with what really matters to me?

Phil Wagner

I love how you just call out the absurdity, right? Because you're a professional. This is your life's work. So I think many of us would think, That guy's got it. This is not a battle for him in any way. And it's refreshing to hear you call it out. We live in this divided, politicized, scary world right now. I've been a part of a few projects on campus lately, and I know our students to be resilient, but if you stop and listen, they're holding some anxiety about the world, this absurdity right now, what you call the relentless world. I've got some anxieties about the world right now as a parent, as a professor, from the erosion of DEI and democratic values to the rise of generative AI. Again, the world's spinning fast. I hope I can ask you a personal question here, but does a person like you, you already knocked to this, does a person like you who's so prolific in their work on flourishing amidst challenge, do you hold anxieties about the present or the future? How do you think about flourishing in your own life as you navigate this scary world?

Kelly Crace

Absolutely. I mean, honestly, without exaggeration, every single day, I am heartbroken. I'm inspired, I'm deeply scared, I'm deeply sad, I am deeply hopeful. I experience the wide range of emotions that come with two things: a person caring and a person willing to be connected to their world. And so we are a purposeful relational species. So the only chance that we have at flourishing is to be engaged in things that are deeply purposeful and meaningful to us, but to also be connected to the impact of that and to be connected to. It's not just about me expressing my purpose, but it's about being able to understand your purpose and the impact of your purpose on me and the impact of my purpose on you. And the only way we can do that is to stay connected. And to stay connected honestly and with integrity. We have to do so open-minded and open-hearted, which means that, at times, can be overwhelming. And I can't imagine anyone truly being connected to their world today where there's not at least one moment of every day that's not overwhelming. And what we found is when we studied individuals that consistently, not perfectly, but consistently flourished through their lives, through hardship, through inequity, through scarcity, through all of these things, through marginalization, we found that they are not less afraid than us, and they are not less

overwhelmed than us, and they catastrophize in the same way we do. They just don't land there. So we found it's not how we react to the world, it's how we land from that reaction that really determines whether we move into this deeper level of effectiveness, how we actually define flourishing, how we operationalize it in our research, is this deeper level of effectiveness characterized by a consistent, not a perfect, but a consistent level of productivity, of fulfillment, and resilience. So when we're flourishing, we find that we're doing pretty good work in the things that matter to us. We find ourselves to find meaning and fulfillment in that work, and we find ourselves to be resilient through the hardness and harshness of sometimes the world around that work. And there's nothing passive about that. We found that we can't passively flourish, and we actually can't flourish alone. It is an interpersonal process as well.

Phil Wagner

So you mentioned connection and then the interpersonal processes. Does your work find that some connections or types of interpersonal relationship development are better than others? Because I'm raising a teenager right now who we are trying to break this temptation to see friendship and connection as more than the number of followers you have on social media. What does authentic relational connection look like in this fast-spinning world?

Kelly Crace

Yeah, There's a few things that come to mind when you phrase it in that way. Is one, we find that people that. In fact, part of it is one of the distinctive ways of thinking about social anxiety versus social confidence. How do we find this deeper level of connecting? And one of the factors that's a part of that is people focusing more on being interested instead of interesting. So I'm focusing more on seeking to understand and being actively curious rather than seeking to be understood and trying to find this relationship, this nail, and focus, outcome-oriented; how are we doing right now? So if I'm focusing more on being interesting and I'm focusing more on what matters to me more than anything is my relationship with Phil, then the whole time I'm going to be wondering and evaluating, how are we doing? And when you're talking, I'm not going to be listening as closely because I'm going to be thinking, how do I respond to a way, respond to Phil in a way that he will regard me positively? And that is about trying to be interesting, which just gets in the way. It adds to anxiety. It adds to intensity. And we found that one of the things that block intimacy and in closeness of relationships is intensity. And so if I'm coming in in this more of a value of mindset and being more intense, there's this natural backing away of that from that close intimacy. Whereas I find one of the most endearing things about relationships, even early in relating, is that desire to understand, the desire to be curious. The other thing that we found is a real important factor is being more integrity-minded than experience-minded, where what we focus more on is the healthy expression of what matters to me with other people rather than, Well, then how did it go? Both matter. Engagement has to matter more than the outcome.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I love this. The book I currently just finished, and I even lectured from it because I think it does a really great job of packaging some of these ideas is Charles Duhigg's Super

Communicators. I'm not sure if you've read, but gosh, I love it because it's just that gentle reminder to tune into everyday conversation, to get curious, to focus on connection, to stop in the process of, All right, they're finishing what they have to say. Let me now get my thoughts together, and to just to enjoy each other's common humanity. So I think it's a great work here. I want to talk about values with you. I think a lot about values. I speak a lot about values when we teach management communication, we pull on the Giving Voice to Values framework. We're constantly talking about values. Your work caused me to rethink, re-imagine what I know to be true about values in a really positive way. We often talk about values and their importance in leadership. There are many textbooks that will tell you to go back to your values. In your book, you talk about how values-centered living can get in the way. What do you mean by that?

Kelly Crace

Yeah, in our conversation, you can't do anything with understanding healthy living or value-centered leadership without that notion of the critical importance of living a purpose-centered, value-centered life. We all know the importance of that. Our research did affirm that the only shot you have of flourishing is to be value-centered. The problem is, when we become value-centered, there are certain vulnerabilities that enter our mind that we, as human beings, don't naturally manage well, and so they can start to get in the way. We used to always think, I think we have brought values to more of a virtuous level. And when something becomes a virtue, it becomes so sacred that it can't be challenged. And so what we want to look at is being able to look at values more critically. What we find is the more value-centered we are, the more we decide to care; once you decide to care about something or someone, you are immediately reminded of the uncertainty of that because you never completely control everything that goes into something that you care about or someone you care about. There's always a chance you could fail or lose that person or thing of importance. And if you did, you would pay a cost, you would hurt in some way. So, out of that, what we recognize is that once I decide to care, fear enters the picture. There's this dynamic relationship between values and fear. And human beings, we are taught how to care. We're just not taught how to hold the fear that's associated with caring. One of the best things we can do as parents and as mentors is to actually help individuals learn to hold fear well because we've learned that people that first are not less afraid; they just hold fear well. And teaching young people how to do that, teaching those we mentor how to do that, teaching our peers how to do that is critically important because if we don't, we will just respond naturally to fear management. In the way that we typically manage value-centered fear is either through perfectionistic overcontrol or through avoidance and escape, through procrastination. And so we either escape until it has to be done, or we try to control everything, both lead to chronic worry and chronic guilt. And so it just gets in the way. That's why we found this curvilinear relationship between value-centeredness and effectiveness.

Phil Wagner

Interesting. This leads to those paradigm shifts that you mentioned in your work. I'm hoping we can take the conversation there if you're willing to outline those five major shifts. And that first one is moving from values clarification to a values relationship. Can you break down these

paradigms with me as we go through and what they mean for how we think about our leadership and flourishing?

Kelly Crace

Sure. Real briefly, without being mind-numbingly boring to our audience and to you.

Phil Wagner

Never.

Kelly Crace

I'll be glad to touch base briefly on each one of those. The first one was the most fascinating to us in terms of when we were studying individuals that flourish through hardship and through transition, we learned there's no natural-born flourishers. People that flourish work at it. They're very intentional about it. And one of the pieces of work that was fascinating to us is every year and before every important transition, they would get away by themselves and either formally or informally go through a contemplative process of asking themselves, what matters to me right now? And how would people know that if I couldn't tell them what mattered and all they could do is engage in my behavior? How would they know what matters to me and how healthy is it? How healthy are those values for me? And then they didn't stop there. They would actually then go and share that reflection with someone else and ask the same of them. And we found that what that did is it transformed. It did this paradigm shift from values clarification to values relationship. In other words, it transformed from what my values are to how are my values alive in my life. And the difference that that made, why it was transformative, is human beings are most naturally motivated by fear and comfort. That's what we're most naturally motivated by. But the deepest form of motivation that overrides fear and fatigue are our values, but only if we have a healthy relationship with them. And so, here are my top five values. It does absolutely nothing for me. Fear and comfort will override that every single day. But if I have this deeper relationship with my values, that I almost think of my relationship with them values in the same way that I think of my relationship with Phil, that I think about it, like hopefully every now and then we're getting together and saying, How are we doing? What's great? What's hard? What's stressful? What's joyful? We want to do the same thing with our values, and it starts to lead in a different way that moves us into a deeper level of effectiveness.

Phil Wagner

This was really transformative for me. I thought about values in my own conversation with my mental health guide and therapist. We talked about values, but it really only ever got there. What are they? And it felt good to a certain point to be able to finally put a name to them. Sometimes we're so busy, maybe we don't do that. When I got to your work, I realized, Gosh, that's such a flimsy platform to build on. And so that idea, really, that seems so simplistic, but it changed how I think about my own value systems. Now, that requires a pretty big or deep level of emotional intelligence. How do you recommend somebody gets there if they're not that contemplative by nature? How do you get to that space where you can negotiate that

values relationship if it's not something that comes naturally? Does your work tell us any secrets?

Kelly Crace

Absolutely. It also our work spanned the entire neurodiversity continuum. So, no matter how a brain works, everybody brings both gift and challenge to their world. And so no matter where you are on that neurodivergent continuum, we found that there are still certain things for a person that is not naturally contemplative, a person that is really focused on just the tangible and the concrete, or the focus person that overspends, that overthinks and becomes too deep, and to where they lose the effectiveness of it. We found that there are a couple of things to really focus on. Then, what it was, and it's often an interpersonal process. It's not always a self-process of let me reflect.

Phil Wagner

Great point.

Kelly Crace

It's often an interpersonal process. A lot of the things that we. For instance, one example, often middle school adolescents and adolescents and emerging adults in high school will often say to me, I don't even know what I value. I don't even know what values are. I don't even know what I value. The first question I ask them is, What do you fear? What are you afraid of? Because that will automatically tie into something that's important to them. If you're afraid of something, you can't be afraid of anything that's unimportant to you. So if you're afraid of something, it's got to matter. And so then what we also do is we start tagging behavior. So, for instance, with children, we found that one of the ways to start developing their sense of an awareness of values is to not tell them what to value. Here's what you should value. It's you actually point. You label and, define and describe what you see in their behavior. So, for instance, you may see a child show sensitivity to other people, and you sit there, and then you come into them and say, That's wonderful. I can tell that being sensitive to other people or caring about other really matters to you. Or I can really tell that working hard on something that challenges you is important to you. I can tell being dependable to others is important to you because I just saw you do this. So you pull it from what you see in their behavior, and then you describe it. And that starts to give a child a lexicon of what matters to them. And so we worked very hard on developing over a couple of decades the psychometric properties of an assessment that is designed in a very practical way and also in a still contemplative way, be able to have people identify their current relationship with their values. So, it's not a values assessment tool that says what your values are. It's designed to give you a snapshot of your current relationship with values. But I find going and talking with people that you have some emotional intimacy with, a good friend, a partner, a family member, and talking around things that you care about, or that you're upset about, or that you're worried about, starts to bring up to the surface the lens of what you really care about. Because we found it's operational values that matter, not aspirational values. It's what is really guiding your behavior rather than, Oh, this is what I would like to be, because there's so much social connotation to that of if it's

positive, then, of course, yes, I care about that. But how often does it really guide your behavior?

Phil Wagner

Yeah, that's so good. It's so empowering when you can find that process. That's something we try to do with our kids. I've seen that where, then, like you said, they have a vocabulary. They have a deeper understanding of how I can walk out and, why this rubbed me the wrong way and why things are going. And so really helpful, very empowering. Let's go to paradigm shift, too. That was already a big one. So, we got a lot to unpack. The next one is a thinker because this podcast is diversity goes to work. You got paradigm shift, too, is shifting from equity-minded to integrity-minded. Okay, what does that mean? And how do we square that with our commitments in DEI? Because that E is equity. What do you mean here? Help us unpack this.

Kelly Crace

Yeah, thank you so much, because this has actually evolved over the years in the term, and we've actually evolved the term now. We are using that less frequently because of the connotation with the DEI framework. Well, this work spans over 35 years. And in the first two decades, when we asked people when they were not in a state of flourishing when they were struggling to flourish, or when they were languishing, the most important thing that they said that mattered to them the most is, I need to see a return on my investment of effort. I need to see outcomes that make me feel like I'm getting equitable return on my investment. So they use the term equity a lot, but what they were talking about is outcomes. They were talking about, I need to see outcomes coming back that feel fair to me, that feel like I'm getting a fair return on my investment. And what we found is that moves them into a very outcome-oriented, experience-minded mindset. So, the term we use now more frequently because it makes more sense to people is moving from experience-minded to integrity-minded. In other words, what are my experiences? And so, if they define the goodness and badness of their day by the experiences of the day, that limits our ability to flourish. But because you don't completely control that, you don't completely control outcomes. You don't completely control experiences. And if you do not have privilege and power, there can be times when you have done everything you can do in the best possible way. And because of marginalized opportunities, you didn't get the outcome that you need. We found that when we flourish, we move from being more experience-minded to integrity-minded, which essentially means I'm going to define my sense of work by the healthy engagement of what matters to me, how well my behavior lines up with what matters to me. It never perfectly aligns. But when they are close together, we feel the best about ourselves. It's the cornerstone of adult self-esteem is we feel the best about ourselves when our behavior lines up with what matters to us, and we can be resilient through extraordinary hardship. So you have to look about it in terms of primary and secondary, is when we talk about values, we have to think about them in terms of how we engage in them and what we experience from that. Both matter. Outcomes do matter. Experiences do matter. Engagement has to matter more. And that's really what we're talking about with integrity mindedness, is the healthy engagement in what matters to us and defining that. So when you talk with people that flourish, they define their worth by the healthy

engagement in their values, and the outcomes are just the mood of the day. So they feel the outcomes. If you walk into a person at the end of the day and you ask them, How was the day? If they've had a bunch of bad outcomes, they'll say, It was a bad day. I'm feeling bad because this happened. But it doesn't change their sense of worth because it's more the mood than the worth.

Phil Wagner

Love it. I love it. And I push you there because I love how you frame it, actually. So I think it's great. The one I'm really excited to get to is this third one because we talked about this at the onset. This is a fear-filled world. It's a world that is scary to navigate. So, paradigm shift three is shifting from fear reduction to holding fear well. Wait a minute. I want to get rid of this fear. I'm tired of this world spinning fast, Kelly. So, is there a limit? How much fear can I? Should I? Tell me about this paradigm shift and how it can actually heart in us for this complicated world we're navigating right now.

Kelly Crace

So the, holding fear well really means not trying to be fearless but finding an optimal relationship with fear in the same way that we have both a healthy and unhealthy relationship with values. One of the things we do with individuals to help them clarify their relationship with values is also teach them about healthy boundaries. And so we asked them, with this value of belonging that you have, what does that. When you engage in that, what does that look like when it's healthy? And what does it look like when it's unhealthy? And where are you right now? Well, we do the same thing with fear. So there's a difference between the fear of failure, the fear of loss and danger fear. So when we talked with individuals around their relationship with values and fear, they wouldn't describe it as I'm afraid. They describe it as more pressure. I feel pressure to succeed in the things that matter to me. And I'm afraid of not getting it, or I'm afraid of losing this person I deeply love and care about. And so they feel that as pressure. That's the kind of fear we're talking about holding well. And the good thing about that is it doesn't desensitize us to the hair on the back of our necks when we pick up danger fear. So we don't want to desensitize people to tuning in when their gut and their awareness is telling them, I'm in danger right now. This is not safe for me. And so we found that tuning into that is very important. Sometimes, it's our first form of awareness. I'm not even cognitively aware I'm in danger, but my being is aware that I'm in danger. And so we don't want to mess with that. We don't want to numb that out. But we actually found that in our typical way of managing fear through avoidance, through dissociation, or through trying to control, that does affect our tuning into danger fear because we're either checking out in a dissociative escapist way, or we're tuning in too much, and we're overwhelmed by it. The healthiest way is to recognize that I can't care about anything without feeding the mind into uncertainty. So fear is here. But how do I hold that fear in a healthy way? What does healthy holding look like, and what does unhealthy holding look like? And we found that basically, helping people see fear as an emotion of importance rather than an emotion of threat. This fear of failure really is about a confirmation that I'm engaged in things that matter to me and avoiding some of the platitudes of life. A lot of the platitudes of life, of striving for passion, and striving for my

potential, and striving for happiness, striving for balance, all of those things sound good, but actually, all they do is escalate fear to an overwhelming manner. Instead of passion, flourishing people strive for purpose. Instead of happiness, they strive for meaning. Instead of balance, they strive for harmony. And instead of potential, they strive for a healthy expression. And what we find is it just helps people hold fear in well, so they lead with values. This is actually, Phil, one of the reasons why many of the National Bystander Intervention Models fail, because they're based on a fear reduction model, trying to get people feel less afraid, so they'll step in and intervene. When we found that those that actually step in and intervene in that moment, they're very afraid. They're not fearless. They're very afraid. They're just focusing on something more important than the fear itself, which is intervening in a situation that they feel is important to intervene in. That's where we're trying to get people.

Phil Wagner

I love this. I love this. And so you help differentiate. There are different ways in which we think about fear, which is helpful. And you allude to this, so that gets us to paradigm shift four, which is shifting from avoiding difficult emotions altogether, which I think many of us are hardwired to want to do, to just having a confidence or a greater sense of resilience that I can manage those difficult emotions. Talk to us about that paradigm shift.

Kelly Crace

We were fascinating with studying individuals that, one, they had this healthy relationship with their values. They were more integrity minded they were holding fear well. But for some of these individuals, they also were experiencing deep heartbreak. What happens when we experience heartbreak at a level where we are deeply affected? And one of the most deepest hurts in our life is a values violation. When we think about this in terms of equity, we think about this in terms of a DEI framework, people that are marginalized are on a daily basis, experiencing values violations. And it's the deepest form of hurt because there's a deep wrongness that they're experiencing. And worry is setting in because they're not only hurt by this values violation, they're also wondering, what does this mean? What does this mean for the future? So worry is setting in. How do we flourish through heartbreak, through times when we are deeply affected by something, and during times when we necessarily can't change it? Grief is a great example of that. Grief is an example of, I'm going to be deeply affected by something for a while, and I can't change the fact of this loss. How do I flourish through that? And when we were studying people that were deeply affected by this, they became more elemental. We were looking for brilliant strategies. We were looking for complex, just all-inspiring strategies. Instead, they actually became very elemental. They focused only on three things and that is first, they honored the reaction, but they challenged any conclusion. In other words, they honored the fact that I'm hurt because something hurtful happened. I'm depressed because something depressing happened. That's not clinical depression. That's actually a healthy response.

Phil Wagner

For sure.

Kelly Crace

I'm worried because something worrisome is happening. They honored that reaction, but then they challenged becoming conclusive because when we're affected by something, we tend to get very conclusive. See, my life is screwed. My life is over. See, you can't trust anybody. We get very conclusive, which just stalls and intensifies that storm. Instead, what they do is they very simply honor the reaction. And when they get conclusive, because they do, they get conclusive, too. They catastrophize, too. They catch it. And they say, Stop. They take a deep breath, and they say, stop. This is normal for me to think. It's just not healthy. And then, they turn their attention to the second thing, which is they focus on healthy self-care, but they do it for the health of it, not for the intention of feeling better. They do it because it's healthy for me, not chasing a good feeling, not chasing soothing. They focus more on healthy self-care. And then they don't stop there. They go to the third thing, which is they focus their attention on an important value. They hold on to an important value, even while affected. And the purpose of that is it reminds them that I can be deeply affected by something, but I don't have to be defined by it. I can still engage in things that matter to me, and I'm going to have that define me rather than the current emotion that I'm affected by.

Phil Wagner

Good grief. I don't know if anybody else listening feels like they're sitting in church, but I've read this book, Backwards, and Forwards, multiple times. I got to tell you, you challenge me even here and now because so easy it is to forget those things and to fall back into what we think are healthy habits or healthy steps for moving forward. And yet, I appreciate you clarifying what that looks like. Really helpful there. That final paradigm shift. You said these were boring. These aren't boring at all. These are challenging. You're stepping on all of our toes in the right way. Shifting from, and goodness, shifting from a chronically evaluative mindset to an expressive mindset. I love this. I struggle with this. I have to think about this constantly to try to put it into practice. Talk to us about what you mean there.

Kelly Crace

Yeah, there's a real, and I so appreciate what you're saying about being challenged by this Phil because I'm doing the same thing. This year, for many reasons, has become increasingly absurd for me and increasingly relentless. And I find myself pulling these things that I've learned from lovely people such as yourself in our research, pulling these things out as if I've never seen them again, and holding on to those three steps. It's like the old adage that sometimes we need to be reminded instead of taught. Our wisdom knows the truth of these things already. We just need to be reminded of them. And that last paradigm shift is really about getting at the core of that reminding, of being reminded of the fact that whenever we're leading with the what if, whenever we're leading with fear and the uncertainty of our world, we become very need-based. And what we're needing is reassurance that everything's going to be okay. We will look for that reassurance by becoming very dependent on the outcomes of the day. How did it go today? How did it go today compared to yesterday? Compared to me, compared to you, we're always seeking that reassurance, and that causes our brain to start keeping score.

Phil Wagner

It's exhausting, too.

Kelly Crace

It's exhausting. In fact, this chronically evaluative mindset that we're constantly keeping score, looking for reassurance, is the number one cause of insomnia today. We quiet the body at the end of the day. Our mind turns on and starts replaying that day. And it never replays that day neutrally. It always replays it in some kind of critical judgment, usually along the lines of what didn't get done today, what I need to do tomorrow to make up for it. And then, we develop this plan for tomorrow that's compensatory, so we wake up with anxiety. It's human. It's fully human. We all do it, and we have to disrupt it. And the way the way we disrupt it is to move, shift from this chronically evaluative mindset to an expressive mindset. And what I mean by that is that we define the goodness and badness of our day by the healthy expression of what matters to us. The cool thing about this is as people started training and doing that, we also found, surprisingly, that these people also experienced more flow experiences, that they had more flow experiences. And so what we learn is the expressive mindset is actually the undercurrent that creates flow. And think about that. If I am just defining my sense of self by the healthy engagement in what matters to me, that means I'm fully engaged in that moment. I feel fully enough for that moment. I feel like this is the most right thing for me to do in the moment. And that's actually what promotes flow.

Phil Wagner

I love this, and I think it's a lesson for many of our incoming students that just got to our campus. I think it's natural to be in that evaluative framework, constantly comparing. That exhaustion is clearly already setting in. So, a good reminder here is to shift, to shift, to shift. I love this. All right, so do all of these paradigm shifts a flourishing professional make? Because I'm thinking, I'm a DEI practitioner, and I want to push my organization to do better, to be better, and yet the company is reallocating funding. They don't backfill vacant positions. They seem to be apathetic. What if I'm doing all I can do and I'm practicing these paradigm shifts, and yet there are still obstacles? How do I flourish even then?

Kelly Crace

Here's the good news, bad news with that question is, One of the things that we found in our systems work, in our organizational development work around flourishing, is we did find that one person can matter. If you think about it from a systems framework, one person being more healthy and flourishing in a system changes that system at some level. It does have a systemic impact, so one person can make a difference. However, to that person isn't making enough of a difference. When I look at my system, is it a healthy system, or is it an enabling system? Is it a system that is not moving in the direction that's congruent with my values? Well, very practically, Phil, We found that there's different types of values-related stress. One of the types of values-related stress is what's called intra-role stress. Intra-role stress is stress within a role that is based on a values conflict. When I experience intrarole stress, it means that in this current role, such as a work role, in this current role, the values that I find to be very

important to me I'm either not able to express them at a level that is fulfilling, or I'm having to devote time and energy to other values that I don't believe in. So I'm either having to capitulate my values, or that my values are not being met, or that they're actually being violated. Well, there's actually only three things that we can do to manage that situation. First, try to affect it. Can I affect this culture? Try to implement change within the culture. Is there something I can do to try to affect this systemic norm that I'm experiencing? Secondly, you cope. In other words, you say, I've done everything I can do to try to affect it, but at some level, I am deciding that it is still more right to be in this organization or on this team or in this department, that for some reason I am choosing to stay for reasons that are right for me. In that, you have to be very intentional and active on coping because you still have the power to stay or go. But if you're choosing to stay, and I've done everything I can to change it, then what I do is focus on healthy coping. In also the belief that by me being healthier in this organization, matters at some level. It will matter at some level. And then the third option is, if I've tried to change it and I can't, and coping is less healthy for me, then the third option is to leave. That is always an option. A lot of people feel trapped and stuck because they feel like, I don't have any other option. We always have the option to leave.

Phil Wagner

Yes, we always, always. Such sage wisdom. One final question for you, but it's a very, very practical one. There are many people who listen to this podcast, but many students and I talk to our students because I love our students, and I know you do, too. They're truly the best and the brightest. They give me such joy. I truly. They're so resilient. They carry so much. This is a tough campus. Our academics are tough, but they're so resilient. And yet, if you talk to them, right now, they're carrying a lot. They're concerned about the world. They know that they are going to be part of an alumni group that goes out and changes that world. That's a bewildering ask. So, as we find ourselves in such a tense time, I'm wondering if you can offer any words of wisdom or advice for our students, specifically about how to flourish in this relentless world.

Kelly Crace

Well, I bring no wisdom to this conversation, but I bring a ton of gratitude for the students that we do have. They are just the loveliest of students. And part of the trap of where they're bringing this into, and it's an interesting paradox, Phil. Interestingly enough, the previous developmental stage, having a comparative, outcome-oriented evaluative mindset is actually healthy. So, as an adolescent, as a 12-year-old, as a 13-year-old, I don't have the maturity to be all Zen and be able to see that authentically I'm enough. The only way I can learn about myself is actually to look around and see what am I good at. And how do I think about things based on what other people are saying? That's actually how we learn about ourselves. But it's when they move into this stage of their lives, into an adulthood, into a young adulthood, they have to shift into a different paradigm. And if we could boil it down to just a couple of things. At the heart of it, Phil, the soul of flourishing, the heart and soul of flourishing, basically can be boiled down into four things every day. And that is one, show up. Show up. Sometimes that's the best we can do but commit to showing up. Secondly, show up with your values. Show up with what matters to you. Third, completely define your success by the healthy expression of

those values. And fourth, when the world rewards you for that, you celebrate that as a great day. Not the new standard, but you celebrate it as a great day. And when the world beats you up for that, you focus only on one thing: healthy self-care. And then you show up again. That trains our mind. This same mind that stresses us out, and worries us, and scares us, and hurts us is the same mind that genuinely is healing and genuinely wants to be healthy. We just have to work with it.

Phil Wagner

It's fantastic. Thank you so much for all the knowledge that you bring, but more so who you are. I appreciate your friendship, your guidance, your mentorship. I know that this episode will be helpful to so many as we continue to show up, to put one foot in front of the other, but hopefully with greater resilience, with greater sense of flourishing that, yes, the world's spinning fast, but another day comes and we'll get through it together. Thank you, Kelly, for joining us on this episode. Always great to chat with you.

Kelly Crace

Thank you so much, Phil. It's great seeing you. It's great being with you. And lots of love and admiration for not only what you do, but who you are as a person. You're making a big difference, and thank you for that.

Phil Wagner

Thank you. Thank you.

Phil Wagner

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