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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 97: DR. KELLY CRACE – HUMAN FLOURISHING

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. When it comes to your life and your career, how are you doing? Would you say you're flourishing? Well, most people don't use that term to describe their life, career, and mindset. In fact, most of us are chronic evaluators. We spend much of our time judging ourselves, and when we do that, it becomes difficult to flourish. Our guest today helps professionals and students get to a deeper place to a consistent level of productivity, fulfillment, and resilience. A place of human flourishing. Dr. Kelly Crace is Associate Vice President for Health and Wellness at the College of William & Mary. He joins us on the podcast today to discuss human flourishing and how you can move to a different and better level. Here's our conversation with Dr. Kelly Crace.

Ken White

Well, Kelly, thank you for taking the time to be with us today. You and I are recording right before Thanksgiving. So the holidays are upon us. It's a busy time. Thanks for joining us.

Kelly Crace

Thank you, Ken. I appreciate the invitation.

Ken White

Would you describe what you do? I was going to describe what you do, but I think it'd be better coming from you. In your profession, what is it you do and try to do to help people in their lives, I guess?

Kelly Crace

Right, well, it's been a long journey of over 33 years of really just a fascination and a curiosity as to what really truly predicts human flourishing. Flourishing has been defined a lot of different ways, and it's a very popular term today, but back then, when we were studying it, it was really kind of a consistent level of productivity, fulfillment, and resilience.

So when we're flourishing, you feel like you're doing good work, you're finding meaning in that work, and you're able to be resilient through the hardness and sometimes unfairness or harshness of the world around that work.

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Crace

And that's when we're flourishing, and in our studies of that, we realized that people that consistently flourish they weren't born that way. They work at it. They are very intentional about it until we became fascinated with can you train this? Can you actually develop a training program to help facilitate and foster flourishing in a world where it's hard to do that?

Ken White

Is flourishing another word for happy happiness? Or how do you define it?

Kelly Crace

Not exactly. In fact, one of the things it's interesting it's kind of paradoxical but one of the things that we learned is, and it's related to some of these paradigm shifts that we're going to talk about today is we found that people that consistently flourish they actually don't strive for happiness they strive more for meaning they're more intentional around what is meaningful to me what what is right for me from a values lens. And paradoxically they experience more happiness, but they don't strive for it whereas when we strive for happiness, we become overly sensitized to how are we feeling right now so if I'm happy how do I hold that happiness. And if I'm not happy, what I need to do right now to get happy?

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Crace

And it's more of a volatile experience.

Ken White

It's sort of like going up to the plate and telling yourself I have to hit a home run. You're just not going to do it.

Kelly Crace

Exactly.

Ken White

That's not going to happen.

Kelly Crace

You're exactly right.

Ken White

Tell us about the authentic excellence initiative.

Kelly Crace

That is the kind of a mental training program that we developed from our research as we started learning the factors that people do that consistently flourish in our fascination with can you train that? This training program is designed to kind of move people through thinking differently and kind of training their brain. It's a brain training program of getting them to be more intentional around certain paradigm shifts that foster a deeper level of excellence a deeper level of productivity, and fulfillment. And it's just centered around doing that training program around these five paradigm shifts.

Ken White

And you call it paradigm shifts for moving beyond our neurology.

Kelly Crace

Right.

Ken White

Yeah. What an interesting title.

Kelly Crace

Yes.

Ken White

There are five, and can we walk through them?

Kelly Crace

We can.

Ken White

The first one from values clarification to values relationship.

Kelly Crace

Right. So when we talk about moving beyond our neurology. What exactly does that mean, and what we're finding in today's world? The most natural human motivation is fear. We are naturally motivated by fear, and we also have a nervous system that is designed to respond to that. And so our nervous system is wired for crisis and regulation. That's kind of what we're wired for, and we're finding that in this world of relentless change, a lot of uncertainty, a lot of pressure, and a lot of structure in our lives, our children have experienced structure in their lives since they're two years old all the way through getting to college and building that portfolio to get them to college. That kind of world creates a certain level of stress and pressure that kind of causes us to hover around our neurology and what that means is I'll lead with my natural motivation of fear. Fear will kind of guide that, and we'll kind of base our day based on have to and comfort. So the crisis and regulation thing is we'll create little mini-crises of what do we have to do today what has to be done today in our system gets geared up for that. And after we've done that, we naturally seek comfort. We naturally look for some kind of way of finding comfort or regulation to our life, which is fine. That is fine. But it's also what keeps us moving to this deeper level of effectiveness, this deeper level of meaning and excellence. The five paradigm shifts are designed to move you to that deeper place. We are a purposeful relational species. So we're intended to be more than just living at our neurology. And so, for you to have any chance to flourish, we must have a sense of purpose, and we must understand that purpose in the context of the relationships around us and the world around us. These five paradigm shifts kind of get at that. So that first one. But does that make sense?

Ken White

Yes, absolutely. Right.

Kelly Crace

So the first one is this shift of how we've always heard that values are good for us and that it's important to be value-centered in terms of how we live and how we lead. It's very common in our language today. But what we learned is people that flourish. They move beyond values clarification. Values clarification can become this kind of badge of here are my top five values or here is my badge of my values, which can often become like a platitude or an idealistic mission statement personal mission statement which are good, but we find they really don't tap into a deeper level of motivation. While fear is our natural motivator. The deepest form of human motivation, the purest form of human motivation, is our values, but only if we move from what my values are to a relationship with your values. So interestingly, we find that people that flourish they usually one to two times a year will get away by themselves and either formally through some kind of assessment program or through just their own reflection. They ask themselves what matters to me now and how well does my behavior reflect that. How would people know that about me? And they start

to understand the relationship they have with their values. How is it healthy? How is it unhealthy in the same way of their relationships with other people? They really strive to develop a closer relationship with their values in a healthy way. That's what moves them to this deepest form of human motivation that can stay consistent through stress through pressure, and through mood. We can not be in the mood to be motivated, but when you lead with a deep relationship with values, you can, you can tend to stay motivated through hardship.

Ken White

Interesting. Is this? Do you take them step by step? Is this where you start? Step one from values clarification to values relationship.

Kelly Crace

So part of our research has been on the empirical assessment of values. We spent over ten years taking a completely empirical approach to really trying to assess values at a level that was culturally sensitive. That was generationally sensitive, and that was less about values and fusion. Instead of this is, what you should value is know what are your values. But the assessment was a little different instead of being just a values assessment or a personality assessment. It's designed to be a snapshot of what your current relationship is with your values. So that's the process of the values. So what we'll first do is take them through that assessment it's called The Life Values inventory, and it's an open educational resource, so it's free and available to anyone. But it takes them about 20 to 30 minutes to go through that, and then we walk them through a process of asking them questions about their results that are more relational. So, what value is causing you the most fulfillment in your life and why. What's causing you the most stress and why. What has changed, what value has changed the most for you over the past few years and what value are you hoping to affect this coming year? Just relational-type questions to actually create this bond with their values that is a deeper motivation.

Ken White

Yeah, and you say most of us do take a little time here and there to think about it. What do you prescribe? What should we do?

Kelly Crace

At least once a year, sometimes twice a year but at least once a year when you can feel somewhat clear-minded and clear-hearted that you can really get away and be compassionate in your thinking, not judgmental. That really open-minded and open-hearted of an intent to understand. We kind of talk about it's better to be in an analytical framework than an evaluative framework cause analytical is the true intent to learn.

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Crace

Evaluative is very personal. Good, bad, successful.

Ken White

Judgmental.

Kelly Crace

Exactly.

Ken White

Yeah, no doubt.

Kelly Crace

So in that analytical framework, it is about just asking those very open, honest questions of what matters to me now. Respecting the dynamic nature of who we are as human beings, we used to think that values were fixed, that you had these values, and they stay with you unchanged forever, and that's not true. We are dynamic individuals, so things shift in terms of what's important but more importantly, which kind of leads to the second paradigm shift is it's not only what your values are and your relationship that matters, but how would I know that? It's your values in action that really matter. It's not about aspirational values. It's about operational values. It's putting your values in action to where you start to shift what you give most worth to. Our world kind of defines our worth, and we can get into a pattern of defining our worth by equity. So I put in this hard work, and I hope for a return. I need an outcome. I need it to be a fair outcome. I need an honest return on my investment which is good. Never anything wrong with wanting equity, but when we need equity when we need fairness, that's what causes the level of stress and anxiety and pressure that actually gets in the way of us being at our best. That comes from kind of defining values by how we experience them. That's how we naturally think of values. How do I experience my values? So if I value belonging. How connected do I feel if I value achievement? How well am I achieving? Well, we have found with people that flourish they pay less attention to their experience of their values. What happens from their values and give more attention to the expression of their values? They define worth by healthy integrity and what we mean by that is integrity is essentially the alignment of your behavior with what you say is important. They're never perfectly aligned, but when my behavior aligns with what I believe matters to me, that is when we are. That's when we feel the best about ourselves. It's the cornerstone of adult self-esteem is predicated on integrity. So they shift defining their success and their worth by the expression of their values. And then

they just treat the experience that happens from that is kind of icing on the cake. It's life-enhancing. If I get a fair outcome, well, that just is a great day. But the success of my day is defined by how I act according to my values. So if you followed me around for a month, would you know what I value from just observing my behavior? And that if you did, then that would be me acting with integrity.

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Crace

And if you didn't, then that would be me more acting on fear and more acting on my neurology.

Ken White

Oh, how interesting. And it comes back to fear again. Yes. Takes you off your game plan.

Kelly Crace

Well, the reason for that is we've learned that there's this dynamic relationship between values and fear. You can't care about anything without fear being a part of that because of the uncertainty of what we care about. You never completely control what you care about. And so in that uncertainty, fear and values has this very dynamic relationship, in fact, with some young adults who say I don't know what I value. One of the ways to clarify what you value is to think about what you fear.

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Crace

Because what you fear will be related to something that's very important to you.

Ken White

Interesting. So number one, from values clarification to values relationship, and you just explained number two. From defining worth by equity to defining worth by healthy integrity. The third from reducing fear through control and avoidance to holding fear well. Oh, that's interesting. Tell us more.

Kelly Crace

It gets at that kind of dynamic relationship with values and fear, and so when we studied people that flourish, we found that they're not less afraid than others. They just hold fear really well. And what we find is when we lead with fear or kind of live in our neurology

where fear is kind of guiding our motivation, our most natural way of managing fear is through over-control or through avoidance. So perfectionism and procrastination is the neurologically natural way we cope with values-based fear. So once I care, then the uncertainty about what I care about evokes fear, and we don't. We don't experience that as danger fear. It's more like pressure. We experience it as pressure. We will naturally manage that pressure through control and avoidance. It's called the fear-based model of excellence because you actually attain excellence with it. But it also eventually hits a ceiling effect in an increasing cost. And again, it keeps you at your neurology. Keeps you at that more surface level. Well, what we find is people that flourish spend as much time holding and managing fear and stress so that they can stay focused on what they value. They put fear in its sweet spot.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Crace

And they put stress in it's sweet, sweet spot because they realize stress is a function of importance. You will never hear in our programming that we do with students and with organizations about stress management. We'll never use the term stress reduction because we don't want you to reduce your stress because you're stressed about something that matters to you.

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Crace

We want that to stay in the foreground what matters to you. What we want you to learn how to do is how to manage the stress and manage the fear that comes with that without going into your most natural way of doing it, which is through perfectionistic control or procrastinating avoidance.

Ken White

Is it compartmentalizing?

Kelly Crace

There are several things that several strategies that are related to it. So that paradigm shift of how do you hold fear well. How do you put fear in it's sweet spot? It's actually thinking differently about fear, and so we take them through a few strategies to start thinking differently that their wisdom already knows to be true. They're just not focusing on it. So it's not like you have to convince yourself of it. You already know it's true. You just have to

be mindful of it more intentional of it. And some of those strategies include shifting how you think about the emotion of fear instead of seeing fear as an emotion of threat. You start to think differently about fear and seeing it as an emotion that's associated with importance. So people that flourish. They actually look for the emotion of fear to confirm they're on the right track.

Ken White

There you go.

Kelly Crace

That the fact that my heart is racing or my palms are a little sweaty that confirms that I am doing something that matters to me. That I am engaged in my life. Shifting the paradigm of thinking about failure differently. That failure can be seen as this very personal statement. Fear of failure is actually about fear of another F which is the fear of future. It's people don't mind failing. They mind being a failure. And so when they have a failure experience, they immediately go to. What does this say about me? What does this say about my future? What does this say about the world around me?

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Crace

And that brings fear right to the foreground. It puts it in the foreground of their thinking. Instead, people that flourish treat quote-unquote failure experiences more truthfully. They see it as worthy disappointment. They see it as worthy in that I was engaged at something that mattered to me, and I worked hard for it and didn't get what I wanted. And they honor the disappointment. They honor this thing. They don't just immediately go well. What can I learn from this? They honor the sting.

Ken White

Wow.

Kelly Crace

I worked hard for this, and I didn't get it, and it's disappointing to me. But they go. They don't go one step past that. They keep it only at disappointment because you need no advanced coping strategies to cope with disappointment. Everyone feels capable of coping with disappointment, but no one feels capable of coping with failure. And so they just try to stay very honest, and they work hard for something if they get it. They celebrate it. If they don't, they still see themselves as a success because they engaged in something that was worthy that was worthwhile for them. And they take care of themselves by saying

I'm disappointed, and I'm going to honor that. And will take care of myself. And then I'm going to learn from it. And so we that different level of thinking about fear differently. A paradigm shift instead of striving for happiness which keeps people constantly in the state of fear of am I happy now? Am or am I not happy now? What do I need to do to get happy now? They focus on meaning. Instead of passion, they focus more on purpose. Instead of work-life balance, they strive more for harmony instead of balance. And instead of striving for potential, they focus more on expression. Expression of their values. All for one reason when I strive for passion, for balance, for potential, and for happiness, there's so much uncertainty to that that I don't control. It brings fear to the foreground, but when I focus on purpose, and harmony, and expression, and meaning, I completely control that. And that's the compartmentalization that you're talking about is keeping things within your level of control. Those are just some of the strategies that we kind of to holding fear really well.

Ken White

And it makes sense. Yeah, it makes sense.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Dr. Kelly Crace in just a minute. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education helps companies and organizations from all over the world by creating and delivering customized business and leadership development programs taught by William & Mary's world-class business school faculty. If your organization is looking to get to the next level, contact the Center for Corporate Education to discuss how we can create and deliver a program that specifically fits your needs and gets results. For more information, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with Dr. Kelly Crace.

Ken White

Fourth, from avoidance of hurt to confidence in managing hurt.

Kelly Crace

Yeah. So we are a society that awful lies as hurt, and that is not an actual word, but you, I think you know what I mean.

Ken White

Yeah, of course.

Kelly Crace

Is we are obsessed with not being hurt, and when we are hurt, how do we feel better? And in that, what we find is if you look at it from this process of the paradigm shift is one that we've started with. I have clarified my why. I know what my meaning is. I know what my values are, and I've developed a relationship with them. I am moved to a greater sense of integrity to where you see my values in action. I'm holding fear really well. Well, what happens when life in the world hands you something that is heartbreaking? That's hurtful. That's distressing and that you can't completely fix. In other words, you have to cope. This is really about coping strategies. We always say if you have a problem and can solve it. Go solve it. If you have a concern and can fix it go there first. Go fix it. But what do you do like with grief and loss and other things that are unfair in your world that I can't fix but I have to cope with? How do you thrive and flourish through heartbreak? How do you flourish through times when you're feeling bad for honest reasons that have to ride that storm out? And what we find is people that flourish. They accept the hurt instead of trying to avoid it, which puts us in a protective mindset when we try to avoid hurt. We get very protective, and again that affects how we manage fear.

Ken White

Sure.

Kelly Crace

People that manage this well. Is they accept that the hurt is about the fact that I'm engaged in my life, I'm taking risks of meaning? And sometimes, it's not going to work out well. And during this time of hurt, how do I cope in a healthy way? And they basically kind of focus on three things to develop confidence in managing hurt. First, they honor their reaction and challenge any conclusions. We tend to do just the opposite. We tend to not want to feel what we're feeling when we're hurt. We tend to try to feel better immediately, and we get very conclusive. See, you can't trust anyone. See, there's no fairness, or we become very conclusive about ourselves and our future. What they do is just the opposite. They honor the reaction by saying I'm upset because something upsetting happened. I'm hurt because something hurtful happened. They honor that reaction, but their work is they're very intentional when they start getting conclusive. They say stop. They take a deep breath, and they say this is normal for me to think, but it's not helpful. What is something healthy I can do right now? That would be better for me, and they basically focus on self-care. So the second thing they do is they move from they honor the reaction, they challenge any conclusions, and then they move immediately to self-care. But not with the intention of feeling better. They do so with the intention of for the health of it. It's healthy for me to take care of myself right now. So it's not like they do it to rush to feel better. They just do it because they know it's healthy for them. And then they do a third thing is that they then engage in something of values-based meaning. They step into one of their values even while affected. Even if they say, I'm at 10 percent. They'll still step into

a value and say well, let me go take care of others because that matters to me or let me go pour myself into my work for a little while or let me go talk with someone and let me do some physical expression or meditative expression or mindfulness around self-care. But what this does is it builds a sense of confidence that when I get hurt again, not if or I hope not.

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Crace

When I get hurt again, I have the confidence that I can manage it in a healthy way. And with that confidence, you no longer fear it. I don't fear being hurt. I don't like it. I don't strive for it. I don't want it, but I don't fear it. And because of that, you stay in this deeper level of engagement in your life instead of this protective level of never being hurt again.

Ken White

Interesting. Fifth and final, from chronically evaluative mindset to expressive mindset. What do you mean by that?

Kelly Crace

So when we lead with fear, we're in this constant state of evaluating ourselves. Judgment and evaluation becomes very important because when I lead with fear, I need reassurance that everything's going to be okay. I'll look for that reassurance by becoming very dependent on outcomes, and in that, I'll start keeping score. So I'll just constantly keep score comparatively. How am I doing compared to others? How did yesterday go? What do I need to do tomorrow to make up for yesterday? We're in this chronically evaluative mindset which is actually a big predictor of insomnia today. Of quieting our body, our mind activates and starts judging. Starts keeping score. Instead of this chronically evasive mindset. People that work at flourishing part of their work is moving more into an expressive mindset, and they kind of do five things each day to foster that expressive mindset. An expressive mindset is essentially giving more worth to what you do than what you get from what you do. Both matter, both matter outcomes matter, and people that flourish acknowledge the reality of outcomes. I have to have outcomes to create opportunities for me.

Ken White

Sure.

Kelly Crace

They just focus on what can they do within their control that helps them be their best. And so they focus on getting. They focus on being more verb focused, to be honest. They focus more in their actions than now I'm focused. Being now I'm focused is being outcome-oriented. Being verb focused is focusing on your behavior because you control. So what that actually looks like, Ken, is they kind of focus on five things. To be, to foster an expressive mindset and that starting off every day with what's the most right devotion of my time and energy. The word right is important because that activates their values. Not what I have to do today or what I want to do today. But what's right for me to do today? And then they take a pulse of how am I today. From the standpoint of when I look at this list of what's right for me to do today. Is there any part of me that says I don't know if I can do this because I'm sick, or I'm tired, or I'm sick and tired, whatever it is? Is they're not at 100 percent? What they do is when feeling can't, they focus on what of this can I do, and they get a clear picture of what that is. That's relying on volitional confidence. Volitional confidence is confidence by choice, which basically means when feeling can't, what of this can I do and every time you step into some can when you're feeling that can, it actually neurologically changes how we process fear.

Ken White

I'll bet.

Kelly Crace

Yeah.

Ken White

Yeah, that's powerful.

Kelly Crace

Yeah, so they get at that aspect of finding that acceptable can, and then they imagine that because they want to visualize what they value because if you don't visualize what you value, you imagine what you fear, and you'll move into this place of control and avoidance. So they start off every day what's the most right devotion of my time and energy of that what can I do. Now imagine that. And then they engage in the rest of the day with full engagement of their talent and energy and expressing what matters to them that day and then any time during the day if they get a decision point of, well I could go here they ask that question again. What feels most right at this point in time? So they've activated that deeper level of motivation which is their values. They're working with themselves and engaging in that. At the end of the day, they take a moment and appreciate what they did and why and then ask themselves one question what is one thing I can learn from the day that will help me for tomorrow? So that includes analysis and reflection. I won't go to that last question unless I'm at a place of gratitude. Unless I'm in a

place of self-compassion. So that's one of the reasons why you do this aspect of what did I do today and how can I appreciate that. So they take a moment to appreciate what they did. And that's different than a gratitude journal. Gratitude journals are wonderful, but they typically tend to be things I'm grateful for what happened to me.

Ken White

Ah yes.

Kelly Crace

What we want to do is get them to appreciate how are you engaged in life. And how is that related to your values? And then, what can you learn from the day that will help you for tomorrow? Those five things foster an expressive mindset, and here's the coolest thing. An expressive mindset is what you're in when you're in the flow or the zone experience. That's actually what you're in when I am at my optimal in terms of thinking and performing.

Ken White

Yeah, yeah.

Kelly Crace

And so it's when we let go of the need for these kind of experiences and define ourselves by the expression of what we do as it relates to our relationship of values that you actually start getting more outcomes and getting better experiences because you're operating at your optimal.

Ken White

For our listeners who find the paradigm shifts for moving beyond our neurology interesting, and I'm assuming most of our listeners will find that. Where can they learn more? What can they do? We have talked about the life values inventory. I'll give the web address on that in a minute. We encourage listeners to do that. But beyond that, what about the paradigm shift? How can they learn more?

Kelly Crace

So the heart of that is embedded in that online resource. So it's an open educational resource. It's a dot org. So if they go to lifevaluesinventory.org, they can go and find this content. And it's kind of structured as an online mini-course, so they can go into it and dip in and then pull out and come back to right where they left off. There's some dense information there, but it's a way of being able to kind of go with what speaks to you and go a little deeper into those areas. One of the things that I encourage people to do with these five paradigm shifts. Is for the next six months; pick one. Just pick one to be more intentional. Pick the one that speaks to you right now and understand that a little more

spend a little more time being intentional about that one paradigm shift, and that's enough. That's enough to make a difference. Our authentic excellence initiative is a program that we've been offering at our university and will make it more available to other programs in the future, but that's another area that they can look up and go to the university's website and learn more about that.

Ken White

Excellent. But the bottom line it comes down to flourishing is the word not, not all these other adjectives we might use, all these other words you might use how to flourish in your life.

Kelly Crace

How do we move from fear-based excellence to this deeper authentic excellence? To where excellence is defined by your authenticity by your values, what matters to you, and holding fear well and holding stress well in the process.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Dr. Kelly Crace, Associate Vice President for Health and Wellness at the College of William & Mary. Kelly reminds us that next year William & Mary will launch its Center for Mindfulness and Authentic Excellence. The center will provide resources teaching and research not only for the college community but for individuals and organizations outside William & Mary as well. Also, in the podcast, Kelly mentioned the life values inventory. If you're interested in checking that out, it's online and free. The address is lifevaluesinventory.org. Well, that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate education can help you, and your organization meet and exceed your goals with business and leadership development programs that fit your needs and get results. If you're interested in learning more, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Thanks to our guest this week, Dr. Kelly Crace, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Till next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.