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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 167: KELLY CRACE & DAVID LONG – FLOURISHING THROUGH LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

Ken White

From 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 help make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. Well, for those who've spent years in the military or intelligence community, transitioning to the private sector or any sector can be daunting. That's why William & Mary and its Center for Military Transition has created a unique two-week on-campus program to be held in June called Flourishing Through Life's Transitions. Designed to be a transformational experience, the program will train veterans and members of the intelligence community to transition to civilian positions while flourishing in their lives and careers. It's a transition program like no other. Two of the program's faculty leaders join us today to talk about this unique program. Dr. Kelly Crace is the Director of the Center for Mindfulness and Authentic Excellence at William & Mary. David Long is a veteran and professor at the William & Mary School of Business, where he teaches organizational behavior. They join us to discuss flourishing through life's transitions, what makes the program special, and how it will prepare each participant to be successful during the transition and beyond. Here's our conversation with Kelly Crace and David Long.

Ken White

Kelly, David, welcome. Thanks for joining us. You both have been on the podcast before. Nice to see you again. Thanks for being here.

Kelly Crace

Thanks, Ken. It's good being here.

David Long

Thanks for having us.

Ken White

Kelly, we'll start with you. Flourishing for those who subscribe to the podcast, they've heard of it. You've been here. But for those who haven't, how do you explain and describe the concept of flourishing?

Kelly Crace

There are so many wide and varied definitions of flourishing these days. But in our work around our research and both our application of thinking about flourishing, it's this deeper level of effectiveness. It's kind of taking well-being and wellness to this higher level of more effective productivity, fulfillment, and resilience. It's not looking for a perfect level of it, but it's looking for a more consistent, deeper level of productivity, fulfillment, and resilience.

Ken White

Now, in the program that you'll be offering this summer, you're spending quite a bit of time on flourishing as an individual. What are you looking for in the program?

Kelly Crace

So flourishing looks different for every individual, and especially when you bring those three variables in. In terms of what does productivity look like for me, I think the word that's most characteristic is what is optimal productivity, what is optimal fulfillment, and resilience that looks different for everyone. As you kind of explore this further, it has to be very individualized. We've learned a lot through our research as to things that can predict flourishing. But when you look at the pathway and the journey of that and what that process looks like for every individual, it's a little different, and so we want to honor that individuality. We want to bring people in as a group. We find that doing it in a collective with other people. It enhances that sense of understanding what flourishing looks like for me, but it needs to be personalized and individualized enough to where they feel like this connects to me. This is not a general self-help book that is generally applicable. It's designed to be something that's personalized and very specific to them.

Ken White

And so, while it's individualized, there is the group. What does it mean to you to have the group with similar backgrounds transitioning from the military or from the intelligence community? How does that affect it?

Kelly Crace

Having that shared social reality is a form of support that really is helpful when we're doing hard personal work. This is the work of flourishing. Flourishing is not a feeling. It's a mindset, and it's a mindset that requires work. And we all know that we do hard work

better when we feel supported around us, and support can be both challenge and affirmation. It can be. When do I know this person needs encouraging? And when do I know this person needs to be challenged and coming from a shared social reality, like the military or like the intelligence services. That is one thing that has done very well in terms of providing that right blend of challenge and support to really grow through something that, at first glance, looks impossible to me. I don't see how I'll ever be able to do that. And yet, they find themselves looking back and seeing just how they did that. I'm when they look back. Other people are around them. It's not just them by themselves. And that's why we try to do it as a group.

Ken White

So that first week, what are some of the objectives that you have in store for the participants?

Kelly Crace

So we've learned in our research that a lot of this mindset of flourishing actually involves paradigm-shifting. It's taking away from our just natural way of thinking. We're kind of challenging some of the platitudes that exist in our society and in our world as to what leads to success or what leads to flourishing and really looking and taking some things that we have learned truly predict flourishing and applying them to their lives. And what that basically involves is paradigm-shifting, thinking differently about values, thinking differently about stress, thinking differently about fear. It's about building from the strength that is already their foundation of where they're coming from. But the important issue in all of this, Ken, is transitions are stressful. Even the best of transitions. The best of change is still seen as stressful because our body processes change as I'm leaving something. So you experience that as loss and what I'm going to is uncertain. And I experience that as fear. And so, how do we manage this stressful experience in an optimal way? So for us, we're going to take different paradigm shifts that move them toward the work of flourishing, and they'll end up with an action plan. We call it dynamic blueprinting, where each of them will end up with a blueprint print that has their mental training program that's designed for them individually. And that's for individual as a person. And then they move into the second week with you and David, in terms of how does this compare to my professional identity? How do I apply this to my professional identity working in the business world?

Ken White

David, you transitioned. Did those terms sound familiar, right? Uncertainty and fear.

David Long

Absolutely, yeah. And that's kind of the benchmark of that major transition is the uncertainty and the fear. I was in Florida this past weekend, and I was at a big military ceremony with some friends that I've known for 25 years. I was talking to one of the senior

wing commanders who's going to be retiring at the end of next year, and I was talking to him about that transition. And I said to him, I said, what are you looking for? What are your goals here as you go through this transition? And he said I don't know what it looks like. I just know I want to find something with purpose. I said, okay, I completely understand that. And that, to me, has a lot to do with what this program is about. It's helping people find purpose, whether it be in their personal life and flourishing in their personal life, in that transition, or in their professional life in that transition, and how to flourish in that aspect, too. And that's really what the second week does. It builds on what Kelly has introduced in the first week and that personal aspect of it into the professional aspect of it.

Ken White

So to break down that week, too, the professional, I'm a participant. I don't even know where I'm going or what I want to do. So what will I learn in that second week?

David Long

Right. And Kelly hit the nail on the head with the paradigm shift and thinking about things differently. So if you think about a professional life, you can really break it down into five different components. There's the job you do. And that's the first pillar, the second part of the relationships you have in the workplace and in your professional life. The third is in your leadership and your ability to be a good communicator and to lead other people. The fourth is teams. In your professional life, you work in teams. You're put on teams, often voluntarily or involuntarily, and you need to find a way to work effectively in those teams. And the fifth pillar really is more of an umbrella term, which is career. And so, if you think about the sub-components of your job and your teams and your relationships, they all kind of work into a greater career. And so, for example, in the first of those pillars, the job aspect, we call it the craft. What our research shows is that people who flourish in their craft find meaning. And this is what my friend was talking about when he said purpose. What is it about a job that's meaningful and the things the antecedents of meaningful crafts are things like having variety in what you do, not feeling stuck and doing the same routine every day, having differences and variety across different things, different experiences throughout your job? Second part is something called identity. Identity is where you have identity with your work so that you can look at your work and say, there, I did that. That's something that I can see from beginning to end a finished product. A lot of times, we find ourselves in jobs where we're contributing a piece of it. But we never see the total and so finding identity. A third thing is significance if you think that your work contributes significantly, not necessarily to yourself but to others. If you're making an impact on someone else, that's another way that we find meaningfulness and flourishing in the craft. And so in this second week, that first day, we focus on the craft, and it culminates with the transitioning students, the students going through the transition, getting to spend time locally at one of our alumni's workplaces. And it happens to be a brewery. So they'll get to share a pint and hear about how somebody who graduated from here found

flourishing through opening a brewery and really applying the components of a flourishing craft. Things like meaningfulness and making beer. We'll hear a lot about hops and barley, but we'll also talk about customers and impact and coming full circle on a craft that's flourishing. That's kind of like the first day they'll get to learn about it and then see it applied in the workplace.

Ken White

Those elements, the identity, the significance, that meaningful component, in your opinion, most people in the military feel that? Don't? Does it depend on the position?

David Long

Yeah, I think let's go back to something we learned from week one is about the paradigm shift. Some people may know it, but they may not understand exactly what it means. And so thinking about it differently, thinking about it, as it's saying like, hey, I'm looking for a job, and I need a job to provide certain things for me. It can be, hey, I'm looking for a job, and I want this job to have purpose and meaningfulness, and I get it through these things. This is the path to get that. It's a lot different than just the means to an end. It's more of a journey along that path to provide those things that we find are so important to people.

Ken White

We'll continue our discussion with Kelly Crace and David Long in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business. The great resignation continues as record numbers of people are leaving their jobs. Gallup reports almost half of all professionals in the U.S. Have their eyes on other opportunities. Well, if your company or organization is interested in retaining your best people, consider enrolling them in one of our MBA programs for working professionals. William & Mary's part-time MBA, online MBA, and executive MBA programs are all designed for the professional who works full time. So both the employee and the organization benefit from the experience employees want to feel supported by their employers. Show them your organization cares by investing in their growth. Check out the MBA program at William & Mary by visiting wm.edu. Now back to our conversation with Kelly, Crace, and David Long.

Ken White

Now you've gone through some transition programs, and Kelly, you've taught in somewhat makes this different? The one that's being put together for William & Mary?

David Long

Yeah, I'll take it first. So I have gone through the transitioning programs before, and they're effective at the blocking and tackling much more of the basic skills that you may need. Here's how to write a resume. Here's how to land a job, and this can be extremely

invaluable. This is a much deeper level of understanding. This is much more of a requires some introspection. It also requires you to have a little bit of a growth mindset because you're going to have to get uncomfortable. You're going to have to learn some things that weren't necessarily intuitive to you and to then think about how you're going to apply those things so that you can thrive. And so, it does force you to learn some new things and step outside of your comfort zone a little bit. But that can be extremely rewarding to people. And it's just different than the typical transitioning programs that we see offered.

Ken White

Yeah. Kelly, what do you think regarding those you've seen?

Kelly Crace

I would echo what David said, but also, I think for me, one of the things that makes it distinctive is there is an assumption of strength. We're taking a very positive approach from this. There are oftentimes transition workshops, and seminars can be based on an assumption that's more remedial, implying that there's deficits that need to be corrected. We're taking the opposite approach that the career they have had so far that is moving them into this next chapter in their life has built strength, has built a foundation that we can then use to take them to a deeper level. So it is less kind of remedial, less surface level, and more advanced. We're not talking about resilience. We're talking about advanced resilience. We're not talking about various platitudes that people here to make us feel good. This is about moving people from emotions-centered habit-focused kind of approach to a value-centered healthy-focused approach, and that takes work because our own neurology and the culture around us can move us in directions that actually lead us astray. Well, we're taking the evidence-informed approach of, well, what have we learned about consistent flourishers, the ones that do it at a deeper level and more consistent level. What have they taught us? And what can we predict from that? And then how do we apply those strategies in a more personalized way? And frankly, we've just learned that there are no natural-born flourishers people that flourish work at it. So what is that work, and we get in for two weeks of hard work. The good thing that we know about this group of individuals coming in, they're no stranger to hard work. So we're going to take that platform and that foundation and build on it.

Ken White

All of us agree that the transferable skills these folks have because we see it. We see it in the business school. We see it at the University. So to me, I find it so fascinating that some people don't see that as a positive. It's so evident to us when we see our military students walk in the door. It's like, wow, look what you've done and look what you can do. But it is David, isn't it speaking another language practically? It's like you have to be bilingual.

David Long

Yeah, it is. It is a different language. And sometimes there's those language barriers that don't allow the proper communication to flow as they go through that transition because they really have known one way to speak, and the language is often different in the different context. One of the things that we focus on is building strength across mind and body can be very important in your personal life and in your professional life. The two things that we do, especially in the second week, is focus on relationships and building deeper connections. And how if you have deeper connections in the workplace, not only is it better for your professional life, it's better for your own health, your own health, and wellness. Right. We know that having social connections, having closeness with others can be good for destressing. It can be good for having energy. It can be good for your professional life. It can really help you get along and get ahead in the workplace. And so there's a mutual beneficial aspect of this when you combine the personal and the professional side through flourishing. The other thing is, you mentioned all the different experiences that people who are transitioning bring into—we kind of cap this with the career aspect, that pillar of professional life. But we talk about career, not as a career path but a career portfolio. And when you start to understand the experiences that people in the military and in the intelligence community and government have and how that's part of their portfolio and a portfolio of experiences is extremely invaluable to prospective employers. They want people who think differently who look at problems differently, not just with a unidimensional mindset, but come from it different perspectives. And so when you think about all your experiences, not as a path I've been on, but a portfolio like a diversified investment portfolio. That's the power of that. And you bring that to the table, and it can be really beneficial to the individual personally and professionally.

Ken White

So if someone is listening and they're getting ready to transition, and they're from the military or the intelligence community. Kelly, what question or questions should they ask themselves before deciding I want to be a part of this program?

Kelly Crace

I think any question the most common question before engagement in anything is what purpose does this have for me? Being able to lead with purpose moves you away from what we naturally move to as human beings are most naturally motivated by fear and comfort. So we just drift into this thing of dealing with all the have toos of the day and then seek comfort. But the deepest form of motivation and resilience, and engagement starts with the question of the why? What is the purpose of this to me? So I think people that see this as a good thing to check off a good credential to add to their portfolio probably would not be the best people that will find meaning out of it. It's them asking, what's the purpose of this transition for me? What do I feel I need to be able to move myself to the next level and then look at our curriculum and see if that fits that purpose. If

it does, then we're the right fit. If it doesn't, there's something else out there somewhere else and keep on looking for that.

Ken White

Yeah. David, what do you think? What questions?

David Long

Absolutely, yeah. Just to build on that, I think a good question to ask is, am I willing to step out of my comfort zone a little bit? It depends on the level of the person who is transitioning. I expect that we're going to see a lot of different levels. And what we find is that the more senior you get, the less willing you are to take risks and to make yourself vulnerable. Well, I think a lot of this program is going to be willing to accept some of that risk and to look at things, new ways to build new relationships, to be self-deprecating, to show some humility, and that can be tough for certain people. So if you're willing to take off the heavy armored coat and learn from other people, I think this is going to be a good fit.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Crace

We're going to create a safe environment, but not a comfortable environment. And I think anybody, when they look back at their lives, can see, was there ever a time where they comfortably grew? And so we're going to take them through a growth process that's uncomfortable but safe.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Kelly Crace and David Long, and that's it for this episode of Leadership & Business. If you're interested in learning more about the Flourishing Through Life's Transitions program, there's more information on the William & Mary website for both participants and companies, and organizations who would like to get involved, go to wm.edu. And type flourishing in the search box, and you'll find everything you need. The dates of the program are June 6th through the 17th, 2022. Be held here on the William & Mary campus. You can also contact the Center for Military Transition for additional information. Finally, we'd like to hear from you regarding the podcast. We invite you to share your ideas, questions, and thoughts with us by emailing us at podcast@wm.edu. Thanks to our guests, Kelly Crace and David Long, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White from all of us here at the William & Mary School of Business. Happy Holidays and Happy New Year.