

Federal Judicial Center
In Session: Leading the Judiciary Episode 7
Communicating to Inspire

Michael: Hello, I'm Michael Siegel, Senior Education Specialists for Executive Education at the Federal Judicial Center. Welcome to a podcast focused on executive leadership in the federal judiciary. In today's episode, we'll talk with an author and executive coach who says that all leaders can learn to inspire and motivate those who work for them on a daily basis.

Based on research and her extensive work as a communications expert and executive coach, our guest asserts that it doesn't take charisma to be an inspiring leader. It just takes conversations that bring out the best in others. Our host for today's episode is my colleague, Lori Murphy, Assistant Divisional Director for Executive Education at the Federal Judicial Center. Lori, take it away.

Lori: Thanks, Michael! Today we're talking with Kristi Hedges, author most recently, of *The Inspiration Code: How the Best Leaders Can Energize People Every Day*. Ms. Hedges is a leadership coach specializing in executive communications. Her client's span all sectors, including Fortune 500, and privately held companies, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. She writes for *Forbes.com* and *Harvard Business Review*, and has been featured in *The Financial Times*, *The Wall*

Street Journal, and on CNBC, the BBC, and other networks. She is also the author of an earlier book, *The Power of Presence*.

Kristi Hedges, thanks for joining us.

Kristi: Thanks, Lori. I'm very excited to be here today.

Lori: I want to jump right to one of the central themes of your book. That all organizational leaders can be inspirational. Why do you say that?

Kristi: Well it really is the core finding of the book. And so when I went into the research for *The Inspiration Code*, I had this idea, like many people do, that inspirational leaders are sort of larger than life personalities. You know, we have this image of the person who goes in and sort of shifts the energy in the room, whereas in a big Ted Talk stage or knows just the right thing to say...

Lori: The charismatic leader.

Kristi: Exactly! The people who are, sort of, larger than life in our eyes. But, what I found from hundreds of interviews, the quantitative research on top of it was that leaders who inspire us are actually doing small things, small gestures, the everyday gestures that have a simple connection created because of them. And, that's what inspires us and other people. And, of course, we all know how to do that because we do it, perhaps unintentionally or accidentally, throughout our lives.

Kristi: I'm sure you've had that experience where someone comes to you and says, "Hey, I had a conversation with you 10 years ago, and you said this to me, and I always remember that." And, you're racking your brain going, "What did I say?" I don't remember saying that but it landed on somebody and really had an impact on them.

Lori: So, you say connection is really important. So, in terms of what truly inspires most employees is it connection? Is there something else? Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Kristi: Well, when it comes down to it, what most inspires people is conversation. So, I'll go even further. Most people told me that they were inspired by one-on-one, rather informal conversations. So you know we think about how we practice what we want to say and we want to get our words exactly right. That's not the stuff that inspires us.

And then I call them "Inspire Path" conversations, because they had some particular characteristics which I'm sure that we'll talk about as we go. But one of them was that they weren't forced. They weren't said or to influence somebody. They were offered with no strings attached. They were particular conversations that sort of created space for people to think differently about themselves and about the opportunities in

front of them. And they were conversations that tended to linger, right. They might not have been all that memorable to the person delivering them, but to the person receiving them they really stuck with them.

Lori: You talk about space. So, in the book you called it "Inspirational Space," and giving others the gift of attention. I wonder if you would elaborate on those concepts.

Kristi: Well, if we think about how much of our attention throughout the day is distracted attention, and then also juxtapose that when somebody gives us their full attention - how that feels to us - and you kind of get a sense for where I was going with this. When people talked about people who inspired them in a conversation they had, they would say things like, "They focused on me, and they always had time for me. They made me feel like the most important person in their life at that moment. Even though I know that they had a lot going on, the light that they were able to shine on me in that space was really received like a gift."

And so if you think about the people that you go to for advice, or that you enjoy being around, they aren't looking at their phone the whole time or looking over your shoulder, or distractedly making eye contact around the room. They're just looking at you. And so that doesn't come naturally to a lot of

people, especially in the times that we live in. And so, we have to cultivate that a little bit. And I often say that listening feels like care and attention feels like respect. And, it's funny that when I'll put that up in a workshop people will be busily writing it down because I think because it lands with us.

Lori: Would you say that again?

Kristi: Sure.

Lori: Because I do think that our listeners are going to want to hear it and really take it in. So listening feels like care...

Kristi: Listening feels like care and attention feels like respect. And, of course, the opposite is true as well.

Lori: Okay. In your book, you talk about and introduce us to a four-part code that leads to inspirational conversations. They are: be present, be personal, be passionate, and be purposeful. And I think that what you were just talking about is a little bit of the be present. So let's continue on there. What does it really look like to be present, and how can leaders demonstrate that beyond what you've already said?

Kristi: Well, some of the findings here were...would go into the category of too simple to be true. But, in fact, it actually doesn't take that much to be present. Again, because we don't experience it very much in the workplace, when it happens it's

sort of like the brakes go screech! And you know all of a sudden the conversation feels different.

The first thing to understand is just the impact of your focus. And we just talked about that. I call it often a red-blinking light. So we think about, sort of, our attention, especially as a leader, is like a red-blinking light going through the organization. And when we give our focus things become more important. So just that gesture it has weight and understanding that it has weight.

It can be as simple as finding a space to give somebody your full attention, turning off distractions like your phone, stepping away from email. There was a great study that came out from Virginia Tech when I was writing the book, and as a Hokie I was particularly attuned to it, which said that even having a phone on the table in front of you, turned off, no noise during a conversation, changes the conversation. And, in fact, there is less empathy communicated in the conversation just because that phone is sitting there unused. And so we think that we're doing that as a big favor to the conversation. We need to get it off the table entirely.

And also one of the pieces of research that came out during this phase which I thought was really fascinating was that if we want to be more present, we're more likely to do that if we just say that we are going to be more present. So if I come into our

conversation and say, "Lori, this interview we're having today is the most important thing for the next hour for me, so let's make great use of it and be fully here." Just my saying that changes how we communicate.

Lori: So it's like setting the intention and verbalizing it is important.

Kristi: It's saying a commitment out loud, and psychologically we're also more likely to step into our commitments if we voice them.

Lori: Interesting. Another concept you write about in the book, is called "Earned Dogmatism." And this is fascinating to me. As people gain more expertise they become less openminded and less present. And as you can imagine the federal judiciary is full of seasoned leaders with a lot of experience and a lot of expertise. So how can we avoid falling prey to this?

Kristi: Well so I thought a lot about this question as it relates to the judiciary and what so many people...so much important work that people here do. And I think earned dogmatism is sort of a double-edged sword because we try to get good at things. We want to develop expertise. We don't want everything to be as hard as it is the first time that we do it. But the double-edged sword is that we get so good at it we don't question the way that we do things after a while.

And we tend to become quite dogmatic, as the term here is stated, and closed in.

And so what we can do is stay curious. I mean that's the number one thing, is to ask curious questions. And I talk about those in the book. Those tend to be what and how questions that aren't fact finding but they are really about trying to embrace and have better understanding. And then, this is something that's quite germane to the legal profession, is that we need to examine and debate alternatives. So go in thinking, "What if I'm wrong?"

You know, we go in thinking what is the fastest way to right? What's all my evidence? My confirmation bias comes into play, especially if we've been a leader for 25 years. You know, we think we've seen it all. But to come in and just ask the question, "What if I'm wrong? And if that's the case, what should I be looking for just to make sure that I'm going in the right direction?"

Lori: So I want to shift to the second dimension which is be personal, closely related to the notion of authentic leadership. How is authenticity, or as what you call it in the book, "keeping it real," essential to being personal and inspirational?

Kristi: Well I look at authenticity as the gateway to trust. And there is a lot of conversation out there about authenticity in the leadership realm, and we struggle with it because we're trained to not be 100 percent authentic as leaders. And there's a part of that that's correct, right? We also know people at work who are too authentic, and it's a little bit distracting to the environment. And so there's this sweet spot of authenticity that we try to find. And that's why I talk about keeping it real. It's about just being more of ourselves rather than less as leaders, but doing it in a strategic way. There's a reason. There's a purpose that we're doing it. We're trying to do it for the sake of connection, to build trust, to connect.

So it might be as simple as telling a story about a time that we failed when we were in a job that one of our employees has. Even if it's a little bit embarrassing to us, and we feel like we've worked really hard to get past that, by sharing that story we're doing it in a very strategic way because we're helping that employee see that they can get past it too. So that's what I mean by that whole point of being real is really inspiring to us because we're not inspired by titles, or ideas of people, or facades. We're actually pretty good at sussing those out. We're inspired by real humans in front of us.

Lori: It sounds like that goes into creating that space you were talking about earlier as well.

Kristi: It does. And so I mentioned some quantitative research in the book. I commissioned a Harris Poll study to determine what inspirational characteristics were actually most important. So once I had sort of the sample in the universe, I decided to sort of weight them and see which ones were coming up the most. And the number one inspirational quality was that someone listened to us. And the number two was that they spoke with authenticity. So that really kind of landed with a thud to me because it wasn't what I anticipated when I did the survey.

Because I thought it would be more about how people say things. We spend so much energy in saying things a certain way. I mean, just think about when we are trying to motivate one of our team members. We might think, "Okay, should I say it this way? Should I say it that way?" We want to get our words just right to get the right result. It's not that it isn't important, it's just that it's not what typically motivates us. It's more of the real, the rough stuff, the from the heart stuff that tends to resonate quite a bit more.

Lori: Well you say that we focus on what we are going to say. Actually, you describe listening... You said that it's the number one thing that motivates people as a really important way to be personal. So how can improving our listening skills really inspire those who work for us or work with us?

Kristi: Right, right. So, I think that we are really good diagnostic listeners at work which means... really in life, but we're talking about work here today. Which means that we listen for the facts. We listen to diagnose. We listen to get to the bottom of things. We listen to feed into our earned dogmatism so that we can solve the problem faster. And when we do that we miss a lot of information. And so listening differently in an inspirational realm, it does create that space. It allows us to pick up a lot more information. So if think about a typical conversation like we're having right now, it's actually three conversations: It's what we're saying out loud, and there's an individual conversation in each of our heads. And that one is often louder than anything that is coming out of our mouths.

Lori: And, sometimes, the only one that we are paying attention to.

Kristi: It's often the only one that we are paying attention to because we want to sound smart, and we want to get things right, and all of that. But when we listen differently it's almost like a camera that zooms out and you see more. And so instead of listening for the facts in the matter, for example, we might listen for the whole person. Instead of listening to what we care about we might shift to listen to what they care about. And so if we can set ourselves up to make those shifts, we just find out a lot more information. And it allows us to be better

managers, and often, to just be better people because we are taking in the full the person.

Lori: Another powerful opportunity for leaders to inspire, beyond listening, is recognizing employees' potential. Say more about why this matters and how we do it?

Kristi: So I love this finding in the book. And of all the things that resonated for me as I was writing it is probably one that I think about every single day coming out of it. So the idea there is that when I did interviews with leaders, they talked over and over again about the fact that the people who inspired them had lit up a potential in them. They had seen something in them that they didn't see in themselves. Or maybe there was a little germ of it in themselves, and they sort of put water on it, and it was able to bloom. Or they planted their courage in them. But they left thinking there's more that I can do. There's more possible for me than I thought.

But how people found that... How leaders called that out was in really simple ways. That was just saying, "I see more leadership potential in you because you are so good at connecting with people." Or "You're so good at staying calm in chaos, that is a really good quality for running this large division in a few years in our organization." Or "Don't underestimate the way that you have about interacting with people because that skill is more important than, perhaps, some sort of functional expertise

some of your other peers may have more experience in. Because that quality is actually going to take you...it's going to leapfrog you ahead."

Saying those types of things, they were pretty simple in terms of how they were delivered. And as managers, we see these things in our teams all the time. We know what people's potential is. We just might not call it out. It's just the act of calling it out. This is the other piece that is a little bit important, is that when we do call it out we are what I call N.A.T.O. about it, and that's an acronym: Not Attached to Outcome. So we're not saying it to manipulate them into taking a job we want them to take. We're just offering it. It's up to them to do what they want to with it. And so there's no strings attached. It's just offered. That way of calling out potential allows the other person to really own it for themselves.

Lori: I'm Lori Murphy, and we're talking with Kristi Hedges, author of The Inspiration Code. Kristi, we've discussed two of the four dimensions of what you call the Inspiration Code. The third dimension is to be passionate. How can leaders exhibit passion in a way that feels authentic to them? We already talked about authenticity. And authentic to those who work for them, especially those who are less outgoing or gregarious by nature?

Kristi: Great, great question. So passion came up a lot in my discussions about inspirational leaders. And I got curious about

that because I thought, "What does that actually mean?" How do you get more passionate? How would you even go about that if somebody said, "Hey, you should be more passionate." Great, now what do I do? And so I ended up breaking that down based on the research. And I broke passion down into three areas: energy, emotion, and conviction. So passion is energy, emotion, and conviction.

Kristi: So now we have something to work with a little bit. And it matters because you think about passion as a mood contagion, which is a well-documented phenomenon, which is, that we pick up the emotion and the mood of other people in the room, and we internalize that, especially leaders. Our emotion is actually the strongest one in the group. People are paying more attention to us; therefore they are more likely to pick up the emotional tailwinds that we have.

And so part of being more passionate is just recognizing that this is an important realm to play in. And what passion looks like doesn't have to be the same for each person, so your energy range might be different than my energy range in terms of what high energy or low energy looks like to each of us, but we still have a range. Right? So we often think that, "I have this really narrow range. I'm just not somebody who gets worked up a lot." Well, you do, but it might just look...it might just be a little bit more narrow. It might look a little bit different for you.

But people understand that about us. We know people who have, sort of, a flatter affect if you will - tend to be more calm versus people who are very outgoing, or gregarious, and they have sort of a wider affect. And so a couple of things to think about: One is, being able to match our energy to the occasion. So thinking about, "Where do I want this group to be?" So if I want this group to be calm, I need to dial-down my dial-down a little bit. I want to be a little calmer, almost, than they are because I'm trying to direct them and lead them.

If I want this group to be excited, if I want this group to be worried, sometimes we want our people to be a little riled up, and we want them to see the importance of a situation. Then I want my energy to lead them in that direction. So thinking about us having a range and having a dial. And so setting it to a place that we want to take people to.

Same thing with emotion. We process in emotional terms. If we want to show more passion, we need to be comfortable in the emotional realm. And this isn't new. Aristotle had the magic triangle, which is the persuasive triangle, rhetorical triangle, which had logos-logic, ethos- credibility, and pathos, which is emotion. And so understanding that there is an emotional component to the communication that we have, and understanding what we want that to be, and how to express it is a good place to start.

Lori: What else do leaders need to focus on?

Kristi: Well you know another thing that leaders can focus on is showing conviction. And that's the other piece of this.

Conviction often just shows up in our bodies. There's kind of no other way to put it. Part of it is body language. Part of it is, sort of, understanding, how we want to come across and making sure that we are in alignment with that. So the example that I'll give there is that if there is an organization going through a change initiative, and the leader communicating that change, we want to see them talk about it. We want to see them! And so an email is not going to do it. We prefer to see them in front of us.

What's the reason for that? It's because we're reading them. We're reading them to see how much they care. Do they believe this? Are they nervous? Are they excited? We're picking that up. So that's the idea behind conviction. And so part of a leader's job, again, knowing the emotion that we are trying to put in the room, and, then trying to align ourselves as we speak with that emotion is critical because otherwise we get a lot of cognitive dissonance. So we might be saying, "Hey, this change isn't going to be a big deal." But, if we're looking really squirmy up there, and we're looking nervous, people aren't so sure that's the case.

Lori: Sure. Well, what you're really talking about are nonverbals, and how important nonverbal signals are to communicating. So many of us aren't great necessarily at either reading nonverbals, or, more likely, knowing that we are putting those out there. So how can we get better at knowing what our nonverbals are and interpreting others nonverbals? Could you just speak more about that?

Kristi: For us to work on our body language there is clear research on a couple of things. The acronym that I use is O.U.T. which stands for open up and toward. And that is, in general it's better to be open because that allows people to want to hear what we have to say. Again, we can close our arms for a second, we're reading in clusters so it's not a huge deal, but just kind of being open generally makes people more open to us. Posture, there's a lot of research on posture that we want to be up because when we're up, there is an in-body cognition which is a loop going on, essentially, in our bodies which makes us feel more confident and other people more confident listening to us. And then toward, which is we generally want to be toward people versus away from people. And, that's pretty much all you need to work on with your own body language.

And so we don't need a 10-point plan. You don't need to worry about every single thing. But it is important to be observant

about it, and then make sure that that's in alignment, again, with how we're trying to show up.

Lori: So let's turn to the final dimension of the Inspiration Code - be purposeful. How can we lead with purpose and help others find purpose in their work? You talked a little about this earlier but I'd like you to expand a bit if you would?

Kristi: Sure. So again, with a lot of this book, it's about bringing the ideas smaller. Right? So we don't have to have some grand life purpose that is extremely clear to us that we communicate to everybody around us. But we can actually help people tie into more purpose in their work, and more meaning in their work in smaller but incredibly impactful ways. And so again in the research people told me, "You know, this person was such a role model to me. I watched how they, sort of, lived their lives. I watched what their values were. They wore their values on the outside. They talked about their values. They talked about the importance of what they were doing and why it was meaningful to them. And by the stories they told, and by showcasing that, it helped me tap into what was purposeful for me."

Or they asked me questions. There's a series of questions that I use in the book, and that people often will use in one-to-ones, or in development conversations people, that helped them to get into touch with that idea about the meaning behind their work.

And so just being willing to engage in the conversation is a very powerful thing.

Lori: So if court leaders want to inspire those who work for them, Kristi, what would you say are the top three things you recommend that they do?

Kristi: First of all, say, you should do whatever resonates for you because I am a big believer in you can do a couple of these things and it makes an impact, and so you don't have to do everything. And I think there's some real usefulness in doing things that you are excited to do. So you read the book, or you hear some of this podcast and you say, "You know what? I'm going to do more of that." Great, go do more of that.

If I were to say in the abstract the things that I think have the most impact, right off the bat, the first one is to be present in the moment. Right? Just noticing the level of distraction that you bring into conversations and minimizing that. It's better to have a 15-minute conversation that's uninterrupted, that's focused, where you can really be there, than an hour conversation where you're distracted and taking emails and people are popping into your office.

So you know, instead of feeling like...a lot of people cancel one-to-ones, I hear that a lot. Well they had it, and then it went off the schedule. My advice would be have a shorter meeting but

have a real meeting. Be present in that moment because that's where inspiration is likely to happen. The second thing would be to really listen with intent. So shift your listening. The easiest way to do that is to get and stay curious. So to have that little voice in the back of your mind saying, "What else? What if I'm wrong? What else should I know? What's going on with this person?"

And to ask those questions it tends to change the conversation and change the dynamic, and sort of lay those little breadcrumbs for people to walk away feeling better, or more than, or feeling that dose of inspiration.

Lori: And that goes to really when you were talking about the nonverbals in a face to face conversation, and you're picking up on those nonverbals, just acknowledging or maybe asking a question about what you're seeing.

Kristi: Absolutely, that's the easiest thing to do. I always tell people just sort of say what you notice. Again, without any strings attached. I noticed that when I said that, that you smiled. You know, what excited you about that? A couple of simple questions. Just noticing and asking questions and the use of it. This is a great point. And the third one is, something we've talk about quite a bit today, which is just calling out potential and doing it generously.

So you already see it, just say it. Sometimes I hear people say, "Well, I feel like if I do that too much it won't be meaningful anymore." I've just not seen that happen. If we call out potential honestly, if we call it out with no strings attached, people generally feel good about that. And so that is something that we can all do. It takes a minute at most. It doesn't really take any preparation. We're just calling out what we see. And of course, back to where we started, anybody can do that.

Lori: So anybody can do it, but it is hard to be present, personal, passionate, or purposeful when you're feeling burned out or overwhelmed. You even discuss a personal example of this in your book. And so what are your tips for leaders who want to be inspirational but might be in a state of overwhelm or on the verge of burnout?

Kristi: Well I'm going to answer that in two ways. The first one is...the short answer is what I said earlier, which is that you don't have to do everything. I love the phrase, "Do the next right thing." So if there are things that you feel like you could do, or should do, or have read the book and resonate, or just thinking about that day, just do the next right thing. So if it's having the 15-minute one-to-one because you don't have an hour but having it be really impactful, then do that. If it's calling out something you see, then do that. If it's listening in a different way, then do that. If it's turning off your

phone, and putting it away, and trying to have the best conversation you have, then do that. So just do the next right thing. Don't try to boil the ocean. I think that sometimes that things look too hard and so we don't do anything. We kind have a shutdown reflex.

The second thing I would say for people who are feeling burned out... and I'm embarrassed to say that this did not come to me until I was three-quarters of the way, at least, through the book, which is that these same behaviors that inspire other people also inspire us. So the other way to think about this is looking at this for yourself and saying, "If I'm not being present in conversations I'm probably not going to be very inspired. If I don't have role models around me showing purpose, then maybe I need to get myself around some new people who help lift me up. If I don't have people in my life that I speak to regularly that help me see my potential, maybe I need to reconnect with some folks that I've kind of let slip, right?" And so we also have to inspire ourselves to be able to go into the world and inspire other people.

Lori: So the concept of putting your oxygen mask on first, right?

Kristi: Yeah, exactly! Even things like...we talk about the idea of purpose. Doing a little bit of your own assessment on purpose. Am I really stepping into my own purpose? Am I

reconnecting with what's meaningful for me right now? And just taking some of that reflection time to do that can help us again. We feel it more and then we can role model it to other people.

Lori: So Kristi, is there anything else that you'd like to share with our audience, today?

Kristi: Well, you know, people will often say...ask me, "How has writing this book about inspiration impacted your life?" And it has impacted pretty much everything. I talked about some things that are top of mine, for me the most, but certainly I listen differently and I think about being present very differently. I think about my energy very differently. I think about purpose differently, and potential. But what I love about all of this is that the same stuff that works for us in our work life, it works for us at home. I use this stuff with my kids, frequently, and my friends. I think about how I listen to them differently. I think about if I notice purpose or potential in somebody, I'm just generous to say it because why not?

And so it's those kinds of things that we can think about even more broadly about how we show up in this inspirational way, because it's actually a way of being in the world. And if you feel like, "Wow, I wish I had more people around me like this," then you could be the person. You know, you could be the one that's around other people that inspires them.

It's almost like exercising that muscle on a regular basis will allow you to use it where it's just second nature.

It's a virtuous cycle. Right? We say these things and they come back to us many times over. And you know, back to anyone can be inspirational to anyone, I think the other thing that we should break out of the mold of is who is inspirational to whom? We often think that you need to be a senior leader being inspirational to a young mentor. And work, generations have so much to teach each other. And I hear in private conversations and coaching a lot how important it is for people who have been in the workplace who might be wondering, "Am I doing a good job with this next generation? Am I coaching them well? Am I managing them well?" To also have them feel like, for the people who are mid-level in their career or just getting started, that it's also okay to consider yourself capable of inspiring people who are more senior than you. And in fact, it's a human condition. What makes us feel more than isn't really restricted to the age that we are or the position that we hold.

Lori: Kristi, this has been fascinating and fun, and I really appreciate you sharing your research and your insights with us today.

Kristi: Thank you so much, Lori. I so appreciate you having me.

Michael: Thanks, Lori, and thanks to our listening audience as well. If you are interested in learning more about Kristi Hedges, and her book, *The Inspiration Code: How the Best Leaders Energize People Every Day*; visit the Executive Education page on FJC.dcn and click or tap on podcast. In Session is produced by Jennifer Richter and directed by Craig Bowden. I'm Michael Siegel. Thanks for listening. Until next time.