

Federal Judicial Center  
In Session 29: Leading the Judiciary  
Interview with Dolly Chugh - October 06, 2022

Craig Bowden: Coming up.

Dolly Chugh: And he said this work of being a good person is hard. That just blew me away, that this man had shown more courage in his life than I feel entire cities will show. He's not done learning. He's not done growing. He's still actively trying to be a goodish person, trying to own and learn and do better. I felt like when he said that, I said to myself, if he's not done, then I'm not done.

Craig Bowden: Today on *In Session: Leading the Judiciary*, we discuss how striving for good, keeps leaders and organizations from being better. Dr. Dolly Chugh, the author of *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias*, says being good suggests an obtained goal while striving to be goodish allows room for continuous learning and improvement. Nurturing a growth mindset to be goodish helps us avoid the self-threat often felt when our good identity is challenged and ensures organizations become what we want them to be.

Dolly, a social psychologist and professor at the New York University's Stern School of Business, teaches MBA courses in leadership and management and studies bounded ethicality or what she calls the psychology of good people. Her work has appeared

in top publications to include the *Harvard Business Review*, *Psychological Science*, and the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

This is part one of our discussion with Dolly. Look for part two of the discussion coming December 7, 2022.

Our host is Lori Murphy, Assistant Division Director for Executive Education at the FJC. Lori, take it away.

Lori Murphy: Welcome, Dolly. We're so delighted to have you.

Dolly Chugh: Lori, thank you. I'm really excited to be here.

Lori Murphy: You say that, instead of looking at ourselves as good, we should try to be goodish. So can you tell us what goodish means to you?

Dolly Chugh: What I mean by goodish is this idea that we're in a state of improvement constantly. We're always getting better. No matter what we know today, we're going to know more tomorrow about how our actions affect others, how the world is changing around us, how certain beliefs we grew up with may not be useful or maybe never were.

And this idea of taking accountability for our own learning, taking accountability for our mistakes is what I call being goodish. It's a higher standard than being a good person. It's something that sometimes I haven't explained as clearly as I'd like. So I'll take a chance to get it precise now.

I mean goodish to be a higher standard than good. When you're in a good person mentality, there's really nothing else to do. Right? You just have a fixed mindset. It is what it is. Either you are that or you're not. It's brittle. When you're in a goodish mindset or a growth mindset, you're always actively trying to get better. No matter how good you are or how bad you are, you're always in the state of flux. So I consider it a higher standard, a more active standard.

Something that we're used to doing in a lot of other parts of our lives, you know, where a lot of us in our jobs are better at our jobs now than we were last year. Or as parents we're trying to be better than we were before. Or when we're managing someone new, we know a little bit more about what motivates them now than we did when they first started. That growth mindset is something we know how to activate.

When it comes to the good person identity, the data says on a 1 to 7 scale most of us are at least a 4 in how much we care about being seen as by others, and feeling internally, like a good person. Even though, by the way, we all define this good person totally differently. But however we define it. And yeah, that self-threat comes when I feel that image I have with myself as a good person is being threatened.

My daughter is a big Mets fan. When people say, oh, you're from New York, you must be a Yankee's fan. That's an identity.

She's like, "What? No. I'm a Met's fan. Why would they think I'm a Yankee's fan?" No offense to any Yankee's fans out there. That's her identity.

So we defend identities. We care about it. I'm very invested in thinking about how do we work through that self-threat.

Lori Murphy: How do you know that you're in that state of self-threat? How do you know that for yourself?

Dolly Chugh: Yeah. Well, I mean I think the easiest way to know is to assume you are. Because, well, sometimes, I mean I don't think it's just me. Most of the time we're in what Carol Dweck, a psychologist at Stanford, would describe as a fixed mindset not in our whole lives but on these good person type of issues. We're often in this either I am a good person or I'm not. That's what I mean by this brittle fixed mindset. And when we're in a fixed mindset, what Carol Dweck says is that it could be about anything. It could be about math let's say.

When you're in a fixed mindset about math, you either think I'm really good at math or I'm terrible at math. Wherever you think your math abilities are, you don't view them as something you're going to improve at. It is what it is. We should just assume that's where we are most of the time unless we're intentionally very actively pushing ourselves into what Carol

Dweck would call a growth mindset or what I would call being goodish.

Lori Murphy: It requires a level of intentionality is what I'm hearing from you.

Dolly Chugh: That's a great word for it. It's a level of intentionality. It's a level of liberation because that good person mindset is one in which is very threatening. I mean I somehow need to know how everything affects everybody in the whole world and get it right every single time versus I'm going to try to get it right. But when I don't get it right, I'm going to figure out what I can do to get it right the next time and do better. Which means I have to say I'm sorry, I have to look at the harm I've done. So that kind of stings, but then I get it right the next time and that's liberating.

Lori Murphy: And this goes along with a dichotomy you talk about in the book, shame versus guilt. So can you talk about that a little bit and how that intersects with what you're discussing?

Dolly Chugh: Yeah. Absolutely. People who study emotions, like shame and guilt, are more specific than we are in our everyday language about what those words mean. So we might just use the words like I felt so guilty or so ashamed interchangeably; whereas, a shame and guilt researcher would say

guilt is about a specific action whereas shame is about the person as a whole.

So if I feel guilty that I neglected to thank somebody, I'm feeling guilty about that action but I'm not feeling that I am as a human being somehow a bad human being. If I feel ashamed that I did not thank that person, then I'm sort of feeling in my whole being that I've done something as a human being, that I'm flawed in some way.

What the research shows is that, when we feel shame, we actually withdraw our action. Like that intentionality that you talked about we do less. When we feel guilty, we actually go into action mode and we try to repair the thing. Like, "Oh, I didn't thank that person. I should have. Let me go repair it." So guilt motivates the action. Shame sometimes doesn't. So guilt is actually more useful. We can focus again on not I globally as a human being am completely a mess as opposed to I didn't know that thing, I messed up that thing, I'm going to go fix that thing.

I'm a professor. Right? So I care a lot about building a classroom where my students are motivated to learn, or contributing, or working hard. Or when I ask a question, I'd like to see some hands go up, that kind of thing. One day my teaching assistant, I asked her to do some tracking for me and let me know what I'm missing. She came back and said you're

calling on men disproportionately more than you're calling on women when they have their hands up. I was like, "What? No, no, no, no, no. I strongly believe in the agency of women. How can this be?"

Lori Murphy: So how did you get to a place of a growth mindset, away from shame towards maybe a little bit more guilt, or how did you make a behavior shift as a result of that?

Dolly Chugh: Well, I mean I practice this a lot. I will say it sounds so trite, but it really does get so much easier with practice. Because what I think I have learned is that the world keeps spinning and, therefore, I keep getting opportunities to do better next time by the people I might have unintentionally harmed in the past.

So I hope that's getting at the question you are asking about how do you shift into that. There is a little bit of a virtuous cycle that kind of starts once you start. Like just start.

Lori Murphy: And maybe a little muscle memory that kicks in with the practice.

Dolly Chugh: Yes. Yes. There's also a great rule. It's called the WAIT rule - W-A-I-T - why am I talking rule? This is something I try to use as a little tip for myself in the heat of the moment. It's like somebody says something to me in which I'm like what, no, what, what? I immediately of course want to

explain myself and defend myself. I very much want to explain myself again in case you didn't get it the first time, that kind of thing. I try to just have a little neon light in my head go WAIT rule, WAIT rule, WAIT rule.

So why am I talking rule? Allowing them to tell you what they've experienced, seen, observed, noticed is not the same as saying you agree with it. It's just accepting the gift that someone had the courage to tell you something you didn't want to hear. I mean who wants to tell people things they don't want to hear? That it's not a fun thing to do.

Lori Murphy: Right. Another word for that is feedback, right which can be a four-letter word in some places. But without feedback, we have no possibility to know that we've done something that has caused harm.

Dolly Chugh: Exactly. Exactly. Jack Welch used to be CEO of General Electric. He talked about the more senior you get, or the more power you have, or just the more distant you are from the person who's offering you the feedback is like wearing lots of sweaters where you almost don't even know what the temperature of the room is that you're in. In other words, you're just disconnected. So you need someone to calibrate you. Again, I'm not saying this is easy, but what I am saying it might not be as hard as we think it's going to be.



Lori Murphy: A couple of terms that we haven't yet talked about that you mentioned in your book and I think helped me conceptualize your work were believer and builder. We can be a believer and believe certain things and yet not be builders. So can you help us understand what you meant by those two terms and then what kind of gets us tripped up in terms of moving from believer to builder?

Dolly Chugh: Absolutely. When I was writing the book, the first questions your editor asks you is who's your audience. Like let's write for your audience. And we kind of brainstormed a bit. In the end I said you know my audience. I'm not trying to convince people that bias doesn't exist in the world. If you're absolutely convinced that bias is not a thing or if you're absolutely convinced that white people are the targets of more racial bias than black people, I did not write a book that's going to convince you otherwise.

There is voluminous data in science, but my book is not going to be the one that will bring that home. I am writing a book for believers who believe the science, who believe the data, who believe in values like diversity, inclusion, equality. If you're deeply invested in white nationalism, I'm not going to convince you otherwise. Right? So that's what I mean by believer.

But what I wanted to offer the reader was just because you're in my believer audience doesn't mean that you or I, any of us, have the skills and tools we need to take what we believe and actually build teams and organizations and systems and laws and cultures and courage and feedback loops to actually build those things. That takes skills and tools. That takes practice. That takes a growth mindset. That takes being goodish. So believing in and of itself is not enough. What I'm hoping this book does is give us a path towards being a builder.

I got some wonderful feedback after the book came out that I made it sound like either you are a believer or you're a builder. It's like one or the other. Multiple choice, pick one. Which I think I did write it that way. But the way I should have written it is it really is a continuum that we're sort of moving from believer to builder on some --

I'll use myself as an example. I think on issues of racism I'm further along in being a builder. I think on issues of ableism I'm more in the believer camp and working my way towards builder still. So in different areas of knowledge, we're in different places.

Lori Murphy: I love that. I almost have an image of dials, that on all of these different issues, we're somewhere between believer and builder. Maybe we move one direction and

we go back. The goal is to keep moving toward builder it sounds like.

Dolly Chugh: Totally. Exactly. And goodness knows the world keeps changing around us as well where new perspectives are made visible in the world that we weren't aware of in the past. So just when you think you have nailed it, like so many things in life.

Lori Murphy: What would you recommend for us to get some wider perspectives just to again broaden our scope and to see what we haven't seen?

Dolly Chugh: This is going to sound almost like an eavesdropping thing, but I think social media is the ultimate coffee shop to eavesdrop on people and hear conversations you wouldn't normally be part of. So the way I do this is with hashtags. Like my own ableism is something I've been trying to learn more about. So if I google something, like hashtags disabilities, you'll get some options and then you can search through those.

Then you suddenly are able to eavesdrop on conversations between people who know more than me or having experiences different than mine who may be speaking very candidly on the Internet with other people or arguing on the Internet. You learn a ton in a very efficient amount of time. And to be clear, just like if you're in the coffee shop, nine times out of

ten hopefully we don't like barge over to that person's conversation and be like let me insert my lived experience into your lived experience. I mean you just sit back and pretend you're reading your book while you're eavesdropping. The same thing is true on social media. The idea here is not to insert ourselves at all especially when you feel you need to.

Lori Murphy: That's when you need WAIT.

Dolly Chugh: That's when you need the WAIT rule. Why am I talking? Why am I talking? But I found social media to be amazingly powerful and efficient in way that doesn't put the burden on other people to educate me. I'm not saying we shouldn't talk to other people. I'm just saying like, if something happens at work, you could tell, you get a little nonverbal negative body language over something. Like I have no idea why me saying that is wrong, you can go look it up. Then you will no doubt find an entire conversation somewhere on social media that will explain it.

So it's been incredibly powerful and I think if people -- of course there's a million things to really despise about social media. But if we could curate it as a form of intentional curious eavesdropping, I think it's really powerful.

Lori Murphy: Then we can take what we learn and start to notice more and move forward from there.

Dolly Chugh: Absolutely. I'm sticking with ableism for something. I can't believe there's a whole hashtag about this and then I start reading these experiences people had. I'm absolutely mortified as somebody who's worked in higher ed for almost 20 years. Then I see example after example of things that I'm guilty of with my own students and teaching and I'm like, oh, my gosh. I mean talk about being a believer or not a builder. I mean I never would have thought I was running a classroom that wasn't accessible. But I may sometimes be doing exactly that without realizing it. So you know I'm following the law. This is not that. But I'm not necessarily being accessible.

Lori Murphy: And as inclusive as you want to be, which is going back to the basic premise of what we've been talking about.

Dolly Chugh: So now I notice those things, some of those things. I also now ask questions that I wasn't asking before of my students giving them the opportunity to tell me what I can do better.

Lori Murphy: So, Dolly, you've been immersed in this research, in this work, and you've admitted that you don't have it all figured out. So I'm curious what are you still, as you put it in the book, stumbling upward about? Because one of the things that I was struck by in your book is that there's some

research that when we acknowledge our own imperfections, our own foibles, our own attempts at growth that it really allows others to do the same.

Dolly Chugh: Yeah, that's right. In fact, there's work by Amy Edmondson - a professor at Harvard - about psychological safety. When you're in a psychologically safe team or organization for example, you have a shared belief that you can admit a mistake. You can ask a question, you can take a risk, and propose a - quote/unquote - silly idea.

One of the best ways to raise the psychological safety of a team is for the most powerful person on the team to model doing those things. You know, admitting the mistake or saying something they're working on. So that's very consistent with what you just said.

For me personally, in addition, there's a lot I'm working on. But I would say the thing that's actually most top of mind right now is it came out of in writing *The Person You Mean to Be*. There's a chapter where I talk about the GI Bill in the United States after World War II which I learned about. I think anyone who took an American history class probably learned about the GI Bill and the opportunity to buy a home with a very low cost or no cost mortgage or opportunity to go to college essentially for free. For veterans of World War II, to thank them for their service and give them an opportunity to kind of

jumpstart their lives back in the States, I understood that led to the rise of the suburbs, the rise of the American middle class. It was this incredible thing.

It was only when I was writing this book that I learned that it essentially applied only to white veterans not black veterans. Through this sort of labyrinth of state and federal laws, it basically worked out that the GI Bill was predominantly for white veterans. It was actually the rise of the white middle class and the rise of the white suburbs which, when you hear that, you're like, oh, my gosh, that explains a lot of what we see in the world today: disparities in generational wealth, in home ownership, in college attendance. It doesn't explain everything but, boy, it sure explains some things.

Lori Murphy: Sure.

Dolly Chugh: And the fact that I didn't know about that, you know. I've since given many talks and I sort of played this out in the book, this GI bill learning. But then, when I've given talks about the book over the last few years, I've often asked rooms full of people how many of them by show of hands knew that about the GI Bill. Most people don't including, and I say this with so much respect for educators, many educators don't.

Lori Murphy: I'll admit, Dolly, that when I read that part of your book, I thought, well, of course and, oh my goodness, why did I not connect those dots.

Dolly Chugh: Thank you, Lori. I'll be quite honest. When I read it, what I read about the GI Bill, first I was just like that's just not true. I mean I need to find a more legitimate source. Then, when I kept looking, it's totally legit. But then, secondly, I was angry and I was ashamed. How can I claim to be whatever I am and not know this basic thing? So that led to what I'm thinking about a lot now. I've just written another book about now, which is how do we navigate those feelings?

Okay. So I need to now understand what really happened with the GI Bill. But honest, in that moment I didn't want to because I was just so ashamed. Remember shame makes me act less. I just wanted to retreat and pretend I had never stumbled upon that. And I think that's making it hard. A lot of people never heard of Juneteenth, and then suddenly heard about Juneteenth. And then, well, wait. How did I not know about Juneteenth. How had I not know about the Tulsa massacre.

There's a lot of things we didn't know and there's some unpacking to do of the emotions that come with that. So getting the knowledge and the history is pretty easy. We live in the age of the Internet. Like it's not hard to get good credible knowledge. But navigating the emotional part of doing that I



think is hard. For me it's hard and a lot of people have told me it's hard for them as well. So that's what I'm thinking a lot about right now, is sort of the emotional work of reckoning with history. We don't necessarily -- it makes our heart hurt honestly.

Lori Murphy: Thank you for that. What else would you like to share with us today, Dolly?

Dolly Chugh: Well, maybe I'll just end with a short little story. This is one that I return to time and time again. You asked how do you get out of that self-threat and how do you go into the goodish mindset, I mean this is the touchstone for me.

Many of us know about the Greensborough Four or the Woolworth's lunch counter sit-ins. The 1960 Jim Crow laws prohibiting African Americans from let's say ordering a hamburger at this lunch counter and in many public spaces. And four college freshmen, who would eventually call themselves the Greensborough Four, decided they were going to sit down as black men and refuse to get up unless they were served or unless they were arrested or unless they were dragged out or unless the store closed. And they pledged to be nonviolent in doing it.

This was February 1, 1960. Joe McNeil was one of the leaders of this group. And lighted cigarette butts were pushed on them. Hot coffee was poured on them. Police were called. They came back day after day after day bringing more and more

friends with them, word spreading across the United States starting other sit-ins in other spaces, especially in Woolworths, being a national chain.

This would lead to eventually by the end of the year Woolworths would desegregate all of their lunch counters nationwide. Before and after this and other sit-ins, they were part of the Civil Rights Movement. Today Joe McNeil and the Greensborough Four are many heroes of people who took tremendous risks.

I tell this story because I've been fortunate enough as a professor to have Major General Joe McNeil come speak to my students as a guest speaker several times. The first time he came I cold called him. I didn't know him. I didn't have a relationship with him. I was so nervous. I was like, oh, my students, my 21st-century students appreciate what an amazing opportunity this is and what an iconic figure they're meeting. But they totally did and he was amazing.

I don't know what I was expecting. Some sort of like larger than firebrand activists. That's something from the movies. But he's just incredibly humble, soft-spoken, funny dad joke kind of funny guy, just very sweet. He gave beautiful and inspiring remarks, and then we went to Q&A. Then a student got up and said, "Sir, thank you for your service. Thank you for your courage. Sir, what are your views on gay rights?"

You know what? Joe fumbled in that moment. It was public and it was not good. I don't even remember specifically what he said. But I remember being like, okay, I'm so sorry, I think we're out of time. And I cut it off. I wish I could say that I chatted with him about it afterwards, but I didn't. I didn't in that moment find the courage and/or the words.

I invited him to come back the next year and, to my amazement, the next year when he came back he gave these inspiring remarks. He told this awesome dad jokes. But then, before we went to Q&A, he said, "Just a moment please. Please ask me the questions on your mind because since I was here last year I have learned a lot. I had been watching the news differently. Tuning into stories I used to skip. I've been asking my grandchildren to explain things to me. I've really been thinking about how I was raised and grew up."

I was so taken by this that eventually, when I came to write my book, I interviewed him and asked him what happened between year one and year two of that guest speaking. He said this work of being a good person is hard. And that just blew me away. That this man who's shown more courage in his life than I feel entire cities will show, he's not done learning. He's not done growing. He's still actively trying to be a goodish person. Trying to own, and learn, and do better. I felt when he said that, I said to myself, if he's not done, then I'm not

done. So I offer your listeners perhaps that little touchstone as well.

Lori Murphy: I love it. The ultimate in growth mindset.

Dolly Chugh: Yes. I think there are many things that make him a great man, but perhaps the greatest and less spoken about is his growth mindset.

Lori Murphy: Dolly, where can we learn more about you and your work?

Dolly Chugh: Oh, thank you so much. Well, I have a website, Dolly Chugh. That's [dollychugh.com](http://dollychugh.com). There I have a free newsletter which comes out once a month. People seem to like it. It's kind of bite-sized and zeitgeisty tips on how to be more inclusive. All back issues are on my website.

And I have a new book coming out October 18th called *A More Just Future*. It was inspired by my experience with the GI Bill where I really wanted to think about the past and the emotional work of doing that. So that book will be in stores soon.

Lori Murphy: Well, Dolly, I could talk to you all day.

Dolly Chugh: I'm so grateful to you, Lori, and to all your listeners. I'm sure we don't show the gratitude we should, so thank you.

Craig Bowden: Thanks, Lori, and thanks to our listeners. Look for the second part of our discussion with Dolly in the

next episode of *In Session: Leading the Judiciary* releasing December 7th.

To hear more episodes of this podcast, visit the Executive Education page on [fjc.dcn](http://fjc.dcn) and click or tap podcast. You can also search for and subscribe to this podcast on your mobile device.

*In Session: Leading the Judiciary* is produced by Shelly Easter. Our program is supported by Angela Long, Anna Glouchkova, and the entire studio and live production team. Thanks for listening. Until next time.

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