

Learning to Lead (Featuring Jonathan Dain): Leadership Devel...

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SPEAKERS

Jonathan Dain, Ricky Telg, Phillip Stokes



Ricky Telg 00:04

This is science by the slice, a podcast from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Center for Public issues education. In this podcast, experts discuss the science of issues affecting our daily lives revealed the motivations behind the decisions people make, and ultimately provide insight to solutions for our lives.



Phillip Stokes 00:33

Hello, and welcome to Science by the slice, I'm Phillip Stokes, education coordinator with the PI center. Take a moment and think about impactful leaders in your life. Have you thought of any? If so, maybe you're thinking about teachers, supervisors, coaches, teammates, or even friends or family members. What was it about them that made them effective leaders? When I personally think about impactful leaders and my life, I struggled to pinpoint what exactly they did. But I can usually remember how they made me feel. Still, when I think back about those leaders in my life, it's not actually what they did. It's what I did that makes me remember them as great leaders. I guess what I'm saying is, whatever they were doing to be a good leader to me, I couldn't really tell you, because I was more focused on what I was doing and how I was able to prosper in that moment. Whether that be in school, athletics, or any other pursuit, maybe even just fostering a feeling of purpose in my day to day life. There's a quote from the novel, *The Little Prince* written by French author sent Exupery. That goes, What is essential is invisible to the eye. I believe that effective leadership is not always visible to the eye, but apparent through the impressions and impacts that are made to the beneficiaries and recipients of that leadership. In other words, great leadership cannot be witnessed or accounted for without observing the actions of those that are being led. But don't take it from me, because in today's episode, you'll hear from John Dean, director of the Florida Natural Resources Leadership Institute, better known as nearly at the University of Florida. So now, let's hear more about John's perspective on leadership in a conversation I led. We discussed narrowly and how the organization cultivates leaders to work collaboratively to manage the natural resources that our state and people depend on.

J Jonathan Dain 02:42

Great, well, thank you for thank you so much for inviting me, I'm very excited about this and appreciate the invitation. So thanks to you in the PI center. So my name is John Dane, I direct the Florida Natural Resources Leadership Institute. I'm a faculty member here at the University of Florida, and nearly in our li we presented nearly is an extension program in the School of forest fisheries in geomatics sciences. And what that means is that we are not training students, we're not teaching students in the classroom, as people often associate with universities, we work with professionals around the state of Florida, our mandate is to help support the state of Florida. And management made it tough, its natural resource base. So the nearly program is an eight month training program for natural resource professionals from around the state. And that's very broadly defined, we train people from across all natural resource sectors. So think of people in state agencies and federal agencies, think of people in local governments and city governments think of people in nonprofits and in communities, think of tribal entities think of farmers in agriculture, think of the private sector. So we train people from across natural resource sectors, particularly in how to try to work collaboratively to manage the natural resources that our state and people depend on.

P Phillip Stokes 04:08

Yeah, well, thank you so much for that introduction. And yeah, I should say, I guess, as we get started that I have been through that early program, and yeah, I mean, I can speak that it was just a really phenomenal program. And I would say for me, personally, a life changing program. And so, you know, having leadership development specifically designed for Agriculture and Natural Resources issues. I mean, of course, that's kind of a niche topic, you know, within the greater realm of leadership. Why is that important? Why do you think there's a need for that?

J Jonathan Dain 04:41

Yeah, so I always go back to the fact that when I talk to people who work in natural resources, not all of them but the great majority and I say I'll just use your name for a segment so Philip you work in fisheries fill up your a farmer fill up your wildlife biologists fill up XYZ. You know, what were you You imagine what you're gonna do when you decided you want to pursue that career. And most will say, you know, I pictured myself out on a boat, in a river or in the Gulf, tagging fish, I pickers figure I pictured myself on a farm kind of by myself, tractor, plowing the land, I pictured myself in a forest, laying transects. And very much this idea of being in the natural resource world being in that environment. And then we ask those same people. So what is your life like now that you are a natural resource, best resource professional? People tend to chuckle and say, oh, yeah, well, you know, it's meetings and working with the public and having to work with other agencies, if I'm a regulator, it's working with the regulated if I'm the regulated, it's working with regulators. So the need is for those working in natural resources to strengthen their skills, in terms of working with other people, other groups, other stakeholders, all who have a stake in our natural resource base.

P Phillip Stokes 06:06

You know, it's funny, you saying that reminded me of a moment I had in graduate school, actually. And it was in a research methods course. And we went around the room, it was like, one of the first days and the instructor said, Okay, are you more prone to wanting to do quantitative research or qualitative research? And I think maybe I gave a response, you know, probably quantitative research, because, you know, you can get some hard facts that you can really hang on to so you know, for instance, you know, if I need to get data on water quality, you can you can get that, right. And then the response was, Well, sure, that's all great and fine. But what if you find out that, you know, maybe the water quality is impaired? How are you? How are you going to work with others to make that better? How are you going to figure out, you know, what people are doing to impair the water or whatever it happens to be? I mean, that's just one example. But I guess just going back to the fact that, yeah, we think things are a little more straightforward. And then maybe as we get older or wiser, we feel like are we learned, it's a lot more relationship driven? would? Would you say that is a lot of what you find in the early program?

J Jonathan Dain 07:23

Yeah, I think that's very, very true. And we need the science, we need the research, we need the training in how to best apply fertilizers to crops, we need all that kind of training. But at universities, and even in high schools and things, we get that training, which is fundamental, but we don't really learn anything about how to work with others, especially when issues are contentious. When there are multiple competing interests, we have different ideas about what we're supposed to do with a particular a particular resource, be it water, land, air, food, growing food, whatever it is.

P Phillip Stokes 08:03

I guess, just going off that more, talking about some more of those contentious issues. I know within narrowly, we call those intractable issues, or seemingly intractable issues, right? Because people do have differing priorities. And, you know, think that, you know, our resources should be managed in different ways. And we grow up different in different cultures. And so how would you define some of these contentious issues and tractable issues?

J Jonathan Dain 08:30

Yeah, so an intractable issue in talking about conflict in terms of the way we think about nearly and the way you find in a lot of the scholarship, there are a lot of people who study these things. It's kind of what it sounds like, it's an issue that we just can't seem to solve. It's been going on for a long time, everybody's stuck. And there just seems to be no solution in sight. And natural resource conflicts often fall into that intractable area. And just to throw out a few examples, very briefly, most people in Florida are familiar with the Everglades. Restoring the Everglades is a very complex process. And there lots of different people have different ideas about how it should be done. Should it be done, when should it be done, who should make decisions about when and how it should be done? And the Everglades you know, as we all know, many years ago, people had a particular idea about what that area was, and it wasn't seen as an ecological gem natural resource. It was seen as an area well, you know, we could really develop this week. This would be great for farming, if we drain it, we have great soils, we

can grow things here. And they weren't being horrible people. They just had this very different idea that we know different things now than we knew that the people who live in and around the Everglades are different than we're then outside of the tribal entities who have always said no, this is a sacred place. So now that we're in 2013, there, there's a different baseline of where we are, we're not where the Everglades were back in the 1700s, before colonists came in and really changed the whole plumbing before engineers came and replant replumbed it. So we can't really put it back to what it was. Even if we could for a lot of people that wouldn't actually be putting it back the way it was, it can never be restored, because what was lost is something far more profound than just some water flowing in this direction or some species. So that's what I mean by intractable conflict, because how do you begin to bring together 1000s of stakeholders who are never really going to agree on what to do? And there's so many different jurisdictions. So there are local jurisdictions, there are state jurisdictions there are federal agencies involved all very, very complicated and sovereign tribal entities. So it's attractively because how do you work through something like that? The baselines are different, that people are different, the issues are so complicated. So intractable issues, have many stakeholders, many competing interests, very complex, ecologically environmentally, historically have all sorts of complexities in terms of who's made decisions, changing baselines. So intractable conflicts are intractable because they're just really complicated in many different ways.

P

Phillip Stokes 11:26

John, I'm, I'm kind of all of these memories of gnarly are flooding back into my mind, but one of them is when we were at the Rodman dam in the Rodman reservoir near Palatka, Florida. So the Rodman reservoir was formed because of the cross Florida Barge Canal that basically they wanted to have a waterway, split Florida in half, more or less. And so you said something, you know, shifting baselines, you know, it's the land isn't the same as it used to be. And I know that is a current conflict. But I remember thinking like, someone came to Florida and I don't know, when my idea probably had kind of a big dream, a big idea and wanted to do something kind of one of these like natural resources, entrepreneurs and do something, you know, big. But of course, there are a lot of ripple effects. And it just changes so much. And we need even now today, those decisions are impacting people's lives. And we need leaders to help mediate some of those issues, right?

J

Jonathan Dain 12:31

Yeah. And coincidentally, that was the other or one of the other examples I was going to bring up. Because when they built that Crossfire, Florida Barge Canal, when they started and stopped, they dammed off the Ocklawaha River. And they created what some people call a reservoir, what some people call a pond, what some people call a lake. And it's also one of the best fishing spots in the country. So because of those early decisions, which we can argue about whether they're misguided or not, that had happened. There are people who economically depend on that there are people whose identity is heavily invested. And in that area is a fishing paradise, it's economically important for the county, etc. And there are those who are just as passionately believe that that that dam should come down and the river should be restored. And fishing would be even better if it was restored. And it would bring even more economic development and etc, etc. So just very, very different perspectives on it. And much like I was describing the Everglades, the area in and around that, that dam are controlled by different agencies. And certainly there are lots of different policies and groups who would have

to make the same decision if or when that is going to be restored. So it's a very good. And in terms of an example of an intractable issue. It's been going on for years and years and years and years and years.

P

Phillip Stokes 13:57

Yeah, I think I think I still see bumper stickers that say what free doc law Absolutely.

J

Jonathan Dain 14:01

Yeah.

P

Phillip Stokes 14:04

You know, a lot of times we view disagreement as good or fine. Okay, right. Like we go to a restaurant. We order different things. We disagree on what food is good, and what food is bad. But with conflict, it's a very uncomfortable thing to go through. And I don't know, in a way, it's like you can't have greener pastures. Without that, though. Would you agree with that?

J

Jonathan Dain 14:28

I agree. And we do this little exercise in early which you may recall. And we ask you to think about a conflict that you're familiar with, that you're part of, and everybody can come up with that immediately. Whether it's from their office, whether it's family, whether it's from their community, whether it's something else, and we ask them so just when we're telling, how does that make you feel? And people talk about being angry and frustrated, and confused and bitter and tired and sad, all those sorts of things which you might have. They call negative emotions right painful, as you said. And then we say so stopping there. Is there anything positive that conflict can offer? And people stop and think and say, Well, yeah, I mean, you could form new relationships, new ideas come out. We can develop plans, creative thoughts, partnerships, all sorts of good things to come from it. So why that disconnect? Why when you mentioned conflict, does it make you feel bad? Is it painful, yet it offers all these opportunities? And that's kind of where we start and early, that idea that conflict can offer opportunities and when you differentiate between destructive conflict and constructive conflict, and if we can see conflict, reframe it is collaborative problem solving, instead of how am I going to get what I want? How are you going to get what you want? I'm going to make sure you don't get you want, what you want, etc? How can we well, you know, how can we work together to overcome this issue to fix this, that opens up this world of opportunities for for working through even what seemed like intractable conflict, right?

P

Phillip Stokes 16:11

Yeah. So tell us a little bit more about, you know, how the nearly program goes about developing some of these skills and abilities, these leadership traits that we don't necessarily always think about as leadership traits. But of course they are. What's kind of the process of of

that within early?



Jonathan Dain 16:29

Yeah, that's a really great question. And like I said, we'd start with, we often don't often think about the fact that this is a really unique set of skills and concepts and tools. It's although it's seems like common sense, it's not common practice, the kinds of things we work with. So to answer your question, each year, we have a group of 20 to 24 professionals from around the state. And I think I alluded to this earlier, from all sorts of different sectors and all different parts of the state, those who work inland, those who work on the water, etc, etc. And we bring them together once a month, for eight months. And each month, we have a three day session, where we take them to a different place in Florida, and introduce them to contentious natural resource issue. That could be issues related to the fishing industry, red snapper fishing, that could be issues related to Everglades restoration, as we just mentioned, or to the Rodman dam issue, that could be restoring bays, that could be wildlife corridors, that could be the challenges faced by agriculture, and 2023. So anyway, we bring them together. And there are kind of four pillars to the program or four legs to the stool, I guess you could say. So the first one is you have this really diverse group of people. So as we travel around the state, they get to know each other very, very well. And because they're coming from different parts of the state, different perspectives, different disciplines, different professions, they look at the same issue through very different eyes, and by facilitating many opportunities for them to talk about how they see the issue and why you're exposed to this really vast array of expertise and of ways of looking at things. So the first pillar is that your cohort really gives you this access to all sorts of perceptions and perspectives and knowledge. The second thing is we provide people as you know, with training, so we work with fellows on how do you analyze a conflict or situation? negotiation skills? How do you talk about issues or frame them in a way that brings people together versus pulling them apart? How do you design meetings so that people leave the meeting thinking? Yeah, it was good. We accomplished something versus Oh, Lord, another meeting? How do you in particular, listen to other perspectives? And I probably should have started with listening, because that is really the fundamental skill concept, the fundamental part of everything we do. We all know how to listen but listening in new and different ways, trying to understand why people feel the way they do, as opposed to listening to respond. Okay, I know what I'm going to say now or Philip is wrong or Philip is right. But really listening. Seeking first to understand before seeking to be understood is as Stephen Covey once wrote, and is actually in the Old Testament and in different words. So we work with them on those kinds of skills, really practical stuff that they can go back the next day and apply in their jobs. So a diverse group of focus on those skills and concepts, we always take a field trip. And by that I mean we get people out to see and experience the resource, because I can put up a PowerPoint slide of somebody canoeing on a river and you go, Oh, that's nice, or somebody plowing a field. But being on a farm, being on a river, being on a boat fishing really gives you a sense of what people are concerned about and why. And then the final thing that we do is we introduce the group to stakeholders, people who have different perspectives on the issue, a wide variety of perspectives. So if we were talking about the Rodman dam, we would introduce the group to people who think the dam should be taken down to the river restored. And we'd have you hear from people who passionately feel that that should be maintained as a fishing paradise, we would have you meet with natural resource managers from agencies so that those in the program are not being tasked with deciding who's right. But being tasked with listening and trying to understand the different perspectives. And one of the things that in a way we're most proud of is, you know, we do evaluations after each of these sessions, and we have for

years, and one of the comments that we get most often is, wow, that issue is way more complex than I thought it was. And that's really what we're trying to get at, recognize how complex it is. And then here's some tools to begin to work and address that complexity.

P

Phillip Stokes 21:32

Yeah, it's part of that experiential learning, right? And yeah, when you, when you're there, when you're experiencing at least a snapshot of it, you see it in a whole different way. And you learn more about the complexities. So thinking about, you know, when you go through the narrowly program, or or really any leadership program, you come out, you know, how can a leader empower and enable others, right to act towards problem solving, and, and just, hopefully creating social change?

J

Jonathan Dain 22:08

Yes, that's a really good question. And, you know, if you think about people that you or our listeners are thinking of, is great leaders, whether it's on the international stage, whether it's historically, whether it's in your local community, you realize that they're all really different, because the situations are also different. And that's the reason we really focus on a group of skills that are very helpful in helping people collaborate and work together. And I don't want our listeners to take that as you know, so we want everybody to be happy and hold hands and sing together. You know, of course, that's great if that happens, but it's really about how to work across the aisle, so to speak, how to work with people you might disagree with, and how to find commonalities with them. So my answer your question is that we see leadership as creating the conditions so that those around you can do their best work, right? Sometimes that's referred to as service leadership. And that's certainly a piece of what we do. I mentioned that it really depends on context. So although we passionately believe in getting the input of, or involving as many different stakeholders in pot as possible, because these issues are so complex that no one person could ever understand them, you're tapping into the wisdom of the crowd. There are moments when leadership is emergency leadership. So if there's a hurricane like Hurricane Ian, if there is a fire decisions have to be made, we can't say, Okay, we fill up the hurricane, but let's talk sit down and talk about this, you know, what do you think the best way to, you know, that that's, that's not, not what we're advocating. So we also believe in situational leadership. But our real focus is on the fact that Florida has 23 million people and is growing, we have a remarkable state, it's a beautiful state, our natural resources, people come from all over the world to see them. They may be thinking Disney sometimes, but people come to our beaches and our forests and, and fishing, etc, etc. So we want leaders who work in the natural resource field, who can collectively help manage these natural resources for the benefit of every one. And that's not an easy thing to do when you're busy and have limited budgets and have limited time and have all sorts of things to do. So we try to give people the tools that help again, those around them, do what they need to do in the most effective fashion possible, engaging with those you need to work with.

P

Phillip Stokes 24:57

Well, John Dean, thank you so much for being Guess on science by the slice, I do want to give you a chance to at least tell listeners where they can find out more about neurally. And if you know they're potentially interested in joining the program,

J Jonathan Dain 25:11

great. Well, thank you, Philip. We're actually recruiting for next class right now, which will begin in August 2023. And go through April of 2024. And the first places to go to our website, which is nrli.ai, FASt.s.ufl.edu. We also have a Facebook page at Florida, neurally filo, our IDI and our Li, and those are the two places to start. Go to our web page, give us a call, send us an email if you're interested. And I also encourage people to ask around because you'll be surprised to find that there's not a great many degrees of separation between you and somebody who's been through the program or has had exposure to the program. And so don't take my word for it, ask them what they got out of it, and what nearly leadership is, and we hope you'll find that that compelling. And if I can a big shout out to all our alumni who are just doing remarkable work for the state, and we're, we're very grateful to all of them.

P Phillip Stokes 26:16

I want to close today's episode by reminding you that this series has two episodes. In this episode, you heard from John Dane, and the other episode features a conversation with Christie ciarelli. Be sure to listen to both episodes as both guests had so much insight to contribute about leadership. That's it for me. As always, thanks for listening to science by the slice.

R Ricky Telg 26:43

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