

DON'T CHASE THE NOISE

Staying Grounded When Other People Try to Write Your Story

There is a moment that eventually comes for almost everyone who accepts a leadership role or you are trying to accomplish something.

You discover that people aren't just watching what you do.

They're interpreting it.

They notice who you talk to. They form opinions about why you made a decision. They speculate about your ambitions. They decide who your friends are, what group you belong to, what you might be trying to accomplish, and sometimes even what you believe.

And occasionally, they'll get it completely wrong.

Welcome to leadership.

The natural response is to want to correct the record. We want to explain ourselves. We want to find out who started the rumor, straighten out the misunderstanding, and make certain everyone knows the truth.

Sometimes clarification is necessary. False information that damages another person, an organization, or the mission shouldn't automatically be ignored.

But there is another danger leaders need to recognize:

We can become so consumed with managing what people think about us that we stop managing ourselves.

That's when leadership turns into reaction.

You Cannot Control Every Narrative

One of the hardest leadership lessons is accepting how little control we actually have over other people's opinions.

You can communicate clearly.

You can act ethically.

You can treat people respectfully.

You can explain your decisions.

But you cannot control how every person interprets those actions.

Trying to do so is exhausting.

Imagine carrying a bucket of water while someone keeps poking tiny holes in the bottom. You could spend the entire journey plugging holes—or you could recognize that some loss is inevitable and concentrate on

reaching the destination.

Leadership can feel the same way.

There will always be another opinion.

Another criticism.

Another misunderstanding.

Another whisper.

If you chase all of them, eventually the noise determines your direction.

Know Your Compass

So what keeps a leader grounded?

A compass.

Not a physical one, but an internal understanding of who you are, what you value, and why you're doing what you're doing.

When the noise gets loud, return to a few basic questions:

Was my decision ethical?

Did I treat people with dignity?

Was I acting for the good of the mission rather than simply myself?

Would I be comfortable explaining my actions openly?

Am I becoming the leader I say I want to be?

Those questions matter more than, "What are people saying about me?"

A leader who constantly changes direction based on outside opinions eventually doesn't have a direction at all.

Relationships Shouldn't Require Political Calculations

There is another danger created by rumors and organizational politics.

We can begin viewing relationships transactionally.

Instead of asking, "What can I learn from this person?" we begin asking, "What will people think if they see me with this person?"

Instead of friendship, we see alliances.

Instead of mentors, we see endorsements.

Instead of colleagues, we see competitors.

Instead of people, we see sides.

That is a terrible way to lead—and an even worse way to live.

Some of the most valuable relationships we will ever develop may be with people who think differently from us.

A younger leader can learn from someone who has served for decades.

An experienced leader can learn from someone who just walked through the door.

Two people can disagree strongly about an issue and still share a cup of coffee.

That isn't weakness.

That's leadership maturity.

From I to WE

We've talked before about moving from I to WE and from MY to OUR.

There's another layer to that idea.

WE cannot simply mean:

"People who agree with me."

"People who support me."

"People from my generation."

"People from my group."

If that's our definition of WE, we've simply created a larger version of I.

Real WE is harder.

It requires building bridges.

It means listening without immediately deciding whether someone is an ally or an opponent.

It means refusing to inherit someone else's feud.

It means getting to know people yourself rather than accepting somebody else's description of them.

And sometimes it means sitting across the table from someone who may someday compete with you and still treating that person with dignity and respect.

Competition doesn't require contempt.

Disagreement doesn't require disrespect.

Leadership doesn't require enemies.

When Should You Respond?

"Don't chase the noise" doesn't mean leaders should never respond.

There are times when silence can allow harmful misinformation to spread.

A useful test is to ask:

Does this affect the mission, another person's reputation, organizational trust, or my ability to fulfill my responsibilities?

If the answer is yes, address it calmly and directly.

But if the only thing being injured is your ego, sometimes the strongest response is continuing to work.

Not every comment deserves an answer.

Not every rumor deserves an investigation.

Not every criticism deserves your energy.

Wisdom is knowing the difference.

Consistency Has a Longer Memory Than Rumors

Rumors travel quickly.

Character travels slowly.

That's frustrating because we live in a world that rewards immediacy.

We want people to understand us today.

Leadership doesn't always work that way.

People eventually recognize patterns.

Does this person show up?

Do they keep their word?

Do they treat the person with no title the same way they treat the person with the biggest title in the room?

Do they take responsibility when something goes wrong?

Do they share credit when something goes right?

Are their relationships genuine?

Those answers aren't established through a Facebook post, speech, title, or campaign.

They're established through years of consistency.

That's why sometimes the best response to noise is simply:

Keep doing the work.

The Question Worth Asking

When someone says something about us, our first instinct may be:

"What are they saying?"

Maybe that's the wrong question.

Try this instead:

“Am I still becoming the person I said I wanted to be?”

If the answer is yes, keep moving.

Learn from legitimate criticism.

Correct meaningful misinformation.

Seek advice from trusted mentors.

Have difficult conversations when they're necessary.

But don't surrender control of your direction to somebody else's whisper.

Your reputation matters.

Your character matters more.

And character is built one decision, one relationship, and one conversation at a time.

So keep your compass.

Keep building bridges.

Keep doing the work.

And don't chase the noise.

One person. One conversation. One cup.

Keep doing the work. Ignore the noise.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.

COFFEE CUP WORKBOOK

Episode 16

DON'T CHASE THE NOISE

Staying Grounded When Other People Try to Write Your Story

Don't chase the noise — tend the work and the truth will follow.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Personal Reflection

1. When I hear that someone has criticized me or questioned my motives, what is my immediate reaction?

2. Have I ever changed a decision primarily because I was worried about what other people might think? What happened?

3. What three values make up my personal leadership compass?

4. Which matters more to me in practice: protecting my reputation or protecting my character? Why?

Relationships

5. Have I ever avoided someone because of what other people might think about the relationship?

6. Do I tend to categorize people as allies and opponents? How might that limit my leadership?

7. Who is someone with a different background, viewpoint, generation, or leadership style that I could learn from?

What could I ask them?

Know When to Respond

Think about a criticism or rumor you've experienced.

Does it:

- ☐ Harm the mission?
- ☐ Unfairly harm another person?
- ☐ Damage organizational trust?
- ☐ Interfere with my responsibilities?
- ☐ Primarily hurt my pride or ego?

Based on those answers, does this situation require a response—or should I keep doing the work?

From I to WE

Complete these sentences.

I become a better leader when I stop worrying about:

I can build a bigger WE by:

One relationship I can strengthen this week is:

Coffee Cup Challenge

This week, identify one decision you've been making—or avoiding—because you're worried about what other people may think.

Ask yourself:

Am I making this decision based on my values, or based on my fear of somebody else's opinion?

Then take one action consistent with your values.

It might be making a phone call.

Having coffee with someone.

Asking a mentor for advice.

Repairing a relationship.

Or simply deciding that a rumor doesn't deserve another minute of your attention.

At the end of the week, write down what happened:

Final Cup

What people say about you may influence your reputation for a moment. What you consistently do determines your character for a lifetime.

Don't chase the noise. Keep doing the work.

One person. One conversation. One cup.

Don't chase the noise — tend the work and the truth will follow.

Keep planting.

Keep watering.

Keep showing up.

Keep doing the work. Ignore the noise.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.