

The Human Conversation

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Get To Know Our Guest

**DR. VANCE
COOPER**

Dr. Vance Cooper is a *leadership development consultant and mental health advocate* with 10 years of experience in acute inpatient mental health. With a Ph.D. in Corporate Leadership, he helps people prioritize mental and emotional well-being by equipping them with tools to unlock unrealized leadership potential, without compromising authenticity. *His workshops and keynotes blend compassion with clarity, challenging audiences to lead themselves with the same care they extend to others.*

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HIGHLIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

- **DR. KG:** From your work in the healthcare space, specifically around mental well-being and mental health and how that builds so beautifully into your current work, which is helping individuals find their purpose, find their values, and specifically helping younger people do this, whether it's in terms of their career preparation and planning or simply just finding their place in the world: *Is there a red thread that ties all of it together for you? What's the driving force behind all that you do?*
- **DR. VANCE:** *My mission is ultimately to help extraordinary people unlock unrealized leadership potential without compromising authenticity. So from my view, everybody is an extraordinary being. We all have unique talents, we all have a purpose, and we all have a reason that we put on this earth, and we all have a special gift. And so my goal is always to help people recognize their unique talents and gifts and how they are able to walk in their leadership gift.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *My goal is to help everyone recognize that they are a leader in their unique space and in their unique talent and the younger I can breathe or speak that message into a person, I think the better off they will be in the long run.*
- **DR. KG:** *When did a young Dr. Vance Cooper working in the healthcare say, hey, you know what? That specifically is what my calling is. I'm gonna get working on that.*

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- **DR. VANCE:** *I was looking to study leadership, but I don't know if I really necessarily looked at myself as a leader, at least from the perspective that I have currently. And so while I was studying the theories, I simultaneously was going through this self-discovery process where I really was, I really had to do a deep self-assessment and just kind of recognizing my own unique gifts and my own unique talents and just recognizing that studying leadership doesn't make necessarily make you a leader.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *I've always had a connection where I wanted to give back. I want to give back to people who are coming after me and being able to help pave the way and help them recognize that the things that I'm accomplishing are very real for them as well.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *I want young people especially to recognize that they should never stop dreaming and that there's all different types of paths that they can take whether they decide to go to trade school, whether they decide to go to higher education, whether they just decide to go directly into the workforce, whether they decide to start working and then maybe later on in life as they get older, they decide that they want to go back to school. There's multiple different paths that people can take to be able to reach their goal. But the important thing is for you to never stop dreaming and to really focus on what you want.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *One of the things that I sincerely want to do is help young people recognize that they should be in order for them to reach their maximum fulfillment and for them to reach their, like their maximum potential, they should be going after what they want.*

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- **DR. KG:** *From my own practice, it is sometimes the intergenerational trauma, it is the cultural heritage, it is the historical context. There's so many reasons why at the earliest, I believe it's as young as eight or even six when children already begin to absorb the flag posts, the milestones that, "hey, this is what is possible, this is what is not. Here's what's expected of you." And that subliminal messaging really goes deeply towards shaping our expectations of ourselves, of life, of the world, the lens with which we see the world and experience it.*
- **DR. KG:** *Can you tell me a little bit from the perspective of your work, what the terms ethics and integrity mean to you?*
- **DR. VANCE:** *When I think about ethics and integrity, I think about character. I think about trust. For me, I think that character is one of the most important aspects of leadership because if people aren't able to trust you, it's going to be very hard for people to follow you.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *Good character is definitely a part of being acting in an ethical manner with integrity. One of the things about it is that when you are somebody who has people following you, once it's been determined that the people cannot trust you, trust is something that, it's almost like it's your currency. Once people feel like you've misled them or you've given them a reason to break that trust, it's very hard to get that trust or to earn that trust back from the people.*
- **DR. KG:** *When you think about authenticity, trust, how do you balance that tension when you're working with young people? Are you able to also share with them real, pragmatic, practical tips on how to navigate that tension?*

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- **DR. VANCE:** *I really go out of my way to try to make sure that I don't feel like I'm lecturing people. I want people to be involved, like actively involved in the discussion that we're having. If I am working with some young people, one of the things that I'm doing in the middle of the presentation is constantly stopping, asking questions asking them for to participate and if somebody's shy, calling on somebody to kind of force them to participate, but it's all a part of me trying to make sure that I'm connecting with the students and meeting them where they are. And then also just asking them for feedback as well because as I'm a human, so I don't always get it right.*
- **DR. KG:** When you work with organizations, in your experience, the high schools and organizations you work with- What is their perspective? Are they showing up, in your assessment, with commitment towards these programs? *Are you seeing any shifts perhaps related to commitment of investment and time and resources towards these programs that are so important? Or maybe also in terms of how they're dealing with AI.*
- **DR. VANCE:** I love working with students. I do plenty of things for free and not necessarily doing this to earn money. *But the reality is some of these types of programs, depending on what you want to do with the students, especially if you want to take them places and be able to reward them for things there is a cost behind being able to do that.*
- **DR. VANCE:** I was a part of a program called "My Brother's Keeper Cares". And that's a summer program where they are working with the students, teaching them how to play chess and teaching them how to play golf. But also it's half recreational activity and then half transformation opportunities. They would have various guests come in talking to the students about self-discovery and goal setting and entrepreneurship and investing and all these different various topics.

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- **DR. VANCE:** *Money will come if you're working in purpose, when you are, when you're operating in a way where you're focused on personal gain and you're operating in bad ethics, it almost is always gonna come back to bite you. And so I'm glad that that was definitely one of the biggest ethical lessons because I was really looking forward to being able to make some money that season. But once I found out how unethical the practices were, I really had to step away and just not engage in what he was advising us to do, which, and I'm grateful for that experience.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *Sometimes you might go into a situation where you're early in your career, you're young, you're a little naive and not recognizing that somebody is operating in an unethical manner. You might not recognize it all like right away, but it's very important that if you didn't recognize it, once you do recognize it, you have a decision to make about how you're going to operate, whether you're going to just kind of stay true to your values and not participating in it, or whether you're going to compromise your values and participate. Just people just have to recognize that once you make a decision to compromise your values, it really could come back to bite you. And sometimes it doesn't always come back to bite you right away.*
- **DR. KG:** *I read a book that really shifted my thinking in many ways and helped me understand a lot about this. It's Defy by Dr. Sunita Sa. She writes in the book: why is it that so many good people find themselves in situations where they have an internal radar screeching at them "This is not right. This is not right" and then they feel frozen and paralyzed in those situations.*

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- **DR. VANCE:** *Some cases negligence is not an excuse, but in other cases, when you genuinely were not aware, once you become aware, you have a decision to make. That's just the reality. There's no getting around it. You have a decision to make on if you're going to uphold your values or if you're going to compromise on them.*
- **DR. KG:** *In this very uncertain, rapidly changing world, what are your observations on real world ethical dilemmas most relevant to young people today? And what's your advice for professionals or about to be professionals in grappling with these situations?*
- **DR. VANCE:** *One of the biggest issues that we're facing right now with young people is the use of tools like chatGPT to do work for them rather than using it as a tool. Students do need to recognize, they need to recognize AI as a tool instead of a crutch.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *When you're in higher education, the teachers are trying to challenge your thinking and open up your mind to new perspectives and new concepts. And when you're undermining, you're ultimately undermining, you're trying to undermine a professor, but ultimately you're undermining yourself when you're using these AI tools to do the work for you rather than you doing the work.*
- **DR. KG:** *Young people should be tech savvy, but also put in the necessary work so they can learn the proper way.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *It's just important that we the technology that is available. We making sure that we're using it in an ethical manner and then just also making sure that we're using it in a purposeful way as well.*

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- **DR. KG:** *What is your advice for senior mid-level professionals and leaders inside organizations and organizations themselves on how to build ethical, inspiring, inclusive workplaces to receive this next generation of workforce?*
- **DR. VANCE:** *The most important thing is to establish an environment of self accountability. Because I think that a lot of people, we have people that are responsible for us, but I think that there's a lack of people that take responsibility for themselves.*
- **DR. VANCE:** *Self accountability, I definitely would say is the number one thing that you wanna have implemented into the environment of the professional space.*
- **DR. KG:** *is there a quote, a book, or advice that had profound impact on your way of thinking and being that you'd like to share? I'm sure if your young mentees would ask, they will quote you, but who would you quote?*
- **DR. VANCE:** *A quote from the late great Miles Monroe. "Your job is what you were paid to do, but your work is what you were born to do." Recognizing that your job is your job and your work. Those are two separate things. And like I said, your job is what you were paid to do. Your work is what you were born to do. So I just want people, it's important for people to recognize that they should be focused on their work and not always necessarily focus on their job.*

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