

Growth Mindset Thinkers

Video: Teaching Leadership

(JIM FISHER:) The teaching in this faculty and being all this stuff, is really a third career for me. So I actually started in -- my first career was in management consulting. And I worked for a lot of corporate and political leaders for a number of years. And then I got into industry and ended up running some quite big companies. A couple billion dollars, thousands of people, all that sort of thing. And then one day after I had left that, somebody phoned me one day and asked me if I would be interested in teaching a course, which was called Human Resource Management. Because nobody thought leadership could be taught. There was a whole period where we didn't actually think leadership was teachable. So I was asked to teach this course on human resource management. And it was all about, kind of, the human resource functions in a corporation. And the view was that somebody who'd actually run a company and worked with companies would be able to teach that maybe more effectively than somebody who was just teaching theory. And it happened in a time in my life when I didn't have anything else pressing. So I thought, oh well, why not? I'd give it a try.

But when I looked at the curriculum, which was about the HR function, I didn't really feel excited about it. And I remember I asked the person who was the director of that program, I said, "Look, I'll teach a course on human resource management, but what I want to do is teach a course which is about, How do you manage humans and turn them into a resource?" Because what I'd seen in my consulting life and in my corporate life was that we constantly manage people in a way which turns them into a liability. And people who actually work against the company. We don't bring out the best in them. We don't give them a chance to participate. Which I just hated. I just -- something that bothered me all my life. So I said, "Okay, that's what I'm going to do. Will you let me do that?" And to my amazement they said yes.

So I started teaching this course, which I didn't call Leadership at the time because at the time nobody taught leadership because nobody believed it was teachable. And so -- but it was about, How do you manage people and turn them into a positive asset in an organization of any kind? And over the years, that gradually evolved into a course on leadership as I taught and responded to my students and read more about it and simulated more theories. So probably I've now been doing this now for about 12 years. I've been teaching this course in leadership. I teach it in the MBA programs. And then I teach it to all kinds of organizations, all kinds of different places in the world. I'm off to Austria next week. I was in India a little while ago. I think I got to China in September. Or whenever ... November.

Anyway. And then we do lots of things. We do lots of school boards, lots of teaching hospitals, and then lots of corporations. So this has now been something that has become somewhat of a passion. This idea that leadership is actually teachable, which means that I believe it's learnable. And that people can actually learn the things that you have to do to be effective in getting other people to follow you, which is what leadership is all about.