

Federal Judicial Center  
Executive Edge Episode 7  
May 22, 2019

Michael Siegel: Hello. I'm Michael Siegel, senior education specialist for Executive Education at the Federal Judicial Center. Welcome to *Executive Edge*, a podcast focused on executive leadership in the federal judiciary. In today's episode we'll talk with an author and executive coach who says that all leaders can learn to inspire and motivate those who work for them on a daily basis. Based on research and her extensive work as communications expert and executive coach, our guest asserts that it doesn't take charisma to be an inspiring leader. It just takes conversations that bring out the best in others.

Our host for today's episode is my colleague, Lori Murphy, assistant division director for Executive Education at the Federal Judicial Center. Lori, take it away.

Lori Murphy: Thanks, Michael. Today we're talking with Kristi Hedges, author most recently of *The Inspiration Code: How the Best Leaders Can Energize People Every Day*. Ms. Hedges is a leadership coach specializing in executive communications. Her clients span all sectors including Fortune 500 and privately held companies, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. She writes for Forbes.com and *Harvard Business Review*, and has been featured in the *Financial Times*, the *Wall*

*Street Journal*, and on CNBC, the BBC and other networks. She's also the author of an earlier book, *The Power of Presence*.

Kristi Hedges, thanks for joining us.

Kristi Hedges: Thanks, Lori. I'm very excited to be here today.

Lori Murphy: I want to jump right to one of the central themes of your book, that all organizational leaders can be inspirational. Why do you say that?

Kristi Hedges: What really is the core finding of the book. So when I went into the research for *The Inspiration Code*, I had this idea like many people do about inspirational leaders are so larger than life personalities. We have this image of the person who goes in and sort of shifts the energy in the room, or is in a big TED Talks stage, or knows just the right thing to say.

Lori Murphy: The charismatic leader.

Kristi Hedges: Exactly. The people who are larger than life in our eyes. But what I find from hundreds of interviews, quantitative research on top of it, is that leaders who inspire us are actually doing small things. It's the small gestures, the everyday gestures. They have simple connection created because of them, and that's what inspires us and other people. Of course we all know how to do that because we do it perhaps unintentionally or accidentally throughout our lives. I'm sure

you've had that experience where somebody comes to you and says, hey, I had a conversation with you 10 years ago and you said this to me and I always remember that. And you're wracking your brain going, what did I say? I don't remember saying that. But it landed on somebody and really had an impact on them.

Lori Murphy: So you say connection is really important. In terms of what truly inspires most employees, is it connection? Is there something else? Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Kristi Hedges: Well, when it comes down to it, what most inspires people is conversation. I'll go even further. Most people told me that they were inspired by one-on-one, rather informal conversations. So we think about how we practice what we want to say and we want to get our words exactly right. That's not the stuff that inspires us. I call them inspire path conversations because they have some particular characteristics which I'm sure we'll talk about as we go. But one of them was that they weren't forced. They weren't said in order to influence somebody. They were offered with no strings attached. They were particular conversations that sort of created space for people to think differently about themselves and about the opportunities in front of them. And they were conversations that tended to linger, right? They might not

have been all that memorable to the person delivering them. But to the person receiving them, they really stuck with them.

Lori Murphy: You talked about space. In the book you call it an inspirational space and giving others the gift of attention. I wonder if you could elaborate on those concepts.

Kristi Hedges: Well, if we think about how much of our attention throughout the day is distracted attention and then also juxtapose that with when somebody gives us their full attention, how that feels to us, you kind of get a sense for where I'm going with this. When people talk about people who inspired them in conversations they had, they would say things like they focused on me, they always had time for me, they made me feel like the most important person in their life at that moment. Even though I know they had a lot going on, the light that they were able to shine on me in that space was really received like a gift.

So if you think about the people that you go to for advice or that you enjoy being around, they aren't looking at their phone the whole time or looking over your shoulder or distractedly making eye contact around the room. They are just looking at you. That doesn't come naturally to a lot of people especially in the times that we live in, and so we have to cultivate that a little bit. I often say that listening feels like care and attention feels like respect. It's funny. When

I put that up in a workshop, people will be busily writing it down I think because it lands with us.

Lori Murphy: Can you say that again?

Kristi Hedges: Sure.

Lori Murphy: I do think our listeners are going to want to hear it and really take it in. So listening feels like care?

Kristi Hedges: Listening feels like care, and attention feels like respect. And of course the opposite is true as well.

Lori Murphy: Okay. In your book you introduced us to a four-part code that leads to inspirational conversations. They are be present, be personal, be passionate, and be purposeful. I think what you are just talking about is a little bit of the *be present*. So let's continue on there. What does it really look like to be present and how can leaders demonstrate that beyond what you've already said?

Kristi Hedges: Well, some of the findings here will go into the category of too simple to be true, but in fact it actually doesn't take that much to be present. Again because we don't experience it very much in the workplace, when it happens, it's sort of like the brakes go screech and all of a sudden the conversation feels different. The first thing to understand is just the impact of your focus. And we just

talked about that. I call it often a red blinking light. I think about our attention, especially as a leader, is like a red blinking light going to the organization. And when we give our focus, things become more important. So just that gesture, it has weight. An understanding that it has weight. It can be as simple as finding a space to give somebody your full attention, turning off distractions like your phone and stepping away from email.

There was a great study that came out from Virginia Tech when I was writing the book and, as a Hokie, I was particularly attuned to it - which said that even having a phone on the table in front of you turned off, no noise during a conversation changes the conversation. In fact, there's less empathy communicated in the conversation just because the phone is sitting there unused. So if we think we're doing that, that's a big favor to the conversation. We need to get it off the table entirely.

Also one of the things, a piece of research that came out during this space which I thought was really fascinating, was if we want to be more present, we're more likely to do that if we just say we're going to be more present. So if I come into our conversations and say, Lori, this interview we're having today is the most important thing for the next hour for me so

let's make great use of it and be fully here, just by saying that changes how we communicate.

Lori Murphy: So it's like setting the intention and verbalizing it is important.

Kristi Hedges: It's saying a commitment out loud. Psychologically we're also more likely to step into our commitments if we voice them.

Lori Murphy: Interesting. Another concept you write about in the book is called earned dogmatism. This is fascinating to me. That as people gain more expertise, they become less open-minded and less present. As you can imagine, the federal judiciary is full of seasoned leaders with a lot of experience and a lot of expertise. So how can we avoid falling prey to this?

Kristi Hedges: Well, I thought a lot about this question as it relates to the judiciary and what so much important work the people here do. I think earned dogmatism is sort of a double-edged sword because we try to get good at things. Like we want to develop expertise because we don't want everything to be as hard as it is the first time that we do it. But the double-edged sword is that we get so good at it, we don't question the way we do things after a while. We tend to become quite dogmatic as this, the term here, is stated and closed in. So what we can do is stay curious. That's the number one

thing, is to ask curious questions. I talked about those in the book. Those tend to be what and how questions that aren't fact finding but they're really about trying to embrace and have better understanding.

Then this is something that's quite germane to the legal profession, is that we need to examine and debate alternatives. Right? So go in thinking what if I'm wrong. We go in thinking what's the fastest way to write and what's on my evidence. Like confirmation bias comes into play. Especially if we've been a leader for 25 years. You know, we think we've seen it all. But to come in and just ask the question what if I'm wrong. If that's the case, what should I be looking for just to make sure that I'm going in the right direction?

Lori Murphy: I want to shift to the second dimension, which is be personal. Closely related to the notion of authentic leadership. How is authenticity, or what you call in the book keeping it real, essential to being personal and inspirational?

Kristi Hedges: I look at authenticity as the gateway to trust. There are a lot of conversations out there about authenticity in the leadership realm. We struggle with it because we're trained to not be 100 percent authentic as leaders. There's a part of that that's correct, right?

Lori Murphy: Sure.



Kristi Hedges: I mean we also know people at work who are too authentic and it's a little bit distracting to the environment. So there's the sweet spot of authenticity that we try to find and that's why I talk about keeping it real. It's about just being more of ourselves rather than less as leaders but doing it in a strategic way. There is a reason. There is a purpose that we're doing it. We're trying to do it for the sake of connection, to build trust, to connect. So it might be as simple as telling a story about a time that we failed when we were in a job that one of our employees has. Even if it's a little bit embarrassing to us and we feel like we worked really hard to get past that, by sharing that story, we're doing it in a very strategic way because we're helping that employee see that they can get past it too. So that's where the whole point of being real is really inspiring to us. Because we're not inspired by titles, or ideas of people, or facades. We're actually good at sussing those out. We're inspired by real humans in front of us.

Lori Murphy: Sure. It sounds like that goes into creating that space you were talking about earlier as well.

Kristi Hedges: It does. I mentioned some quantitative research in the book. I commissioned a Harris Poll study to determine what inspirational characteristics were actually most important. So once I had some of the sample in the universe, I

decided to sort of weight them and see which ones were coming up the most. The number one inspirational quality was that someone listened to us. The number two was that they spoke with authenticity.

So I thought that they really kind of landed with a thud to me because it wasn't what I anticipated when I did the survey. Because I thought it would be more about how people say things and we spend so much energy in saying things a certain way. I mean just think about when we're trying to motivate one of our team members. We might think, okay, should I say it this way? Should I say it that way? We want to get our words just right to get the right results. It's not that that isn't important. It's just that that's not typically what motivates us. It's more of the real, the rough stuff, the from the heart stuff that tends to resonates quite a bit more.

Lori Murphy: When you say we focus on what we're going to say, actually you described listening. You said it, that's the number one thing that motivates people as a really important way to be personal. So how can improving our listening skills really inspire those who work for us or work with us?

Kristi Hedges: Right, right. I think we are really good diagnostic listeners at work and really in life, but we're talking about work here today, which means that we listen for the facts. We listen to diagnose. We listen to get to the

bottom of things. We listen to feed into our earned dogmatisms so we can solve the problem faster. When we do that, we miss a lot of information. So listening differently in an inspirational realm, it does create that space. It allows us to pick up a lot more information. So if you think about a typical conversation like we're having right now, it's actually three conversations. It's what we're saying out loud, and then there is an individual conversation in each of our heads. That one is often louder than anything that's coming out of our mouths.

Lori Murphy: And sometimes the only one we're paying attention to.

Kristi Hedges: Often the only one we're paying attention to because we want to sound smart. We want to get things right and all of that. But when we listen differently, it's almost like a camera that zooms out and you see more. So instead of listening for the facts in the matter for example, we might listen for the whole person. Instead of listening to what we care about, we might shift to listen to what they care about. So if we can set ourselves up to make those shifts, we just find a lot more information. It allows us to be better managers and often just to be better people because we take in the full person.

Lori Murphy: Another powerful opportunity for leaders to inspire beyond listening is recognizing employee's potential. Say more about why this matters and how we do it.

Kristi Hedges: I love this finding in the book. Of all the things that resonated for me as I was writing it, it's probably one that I think about every single day coming out of it. The idea there is that, when I did interviews with leaders, they talked over and over again about the fact that these people who inspire them had lit up a potential in them. They had seen something in them that they didn't see in themselves. Maybe there's a little germ of it in themselves and they sort of put water on it and was able to bloom or they burrowed their courage in them. But they left thinking there is more than I can do, there is more of this possible for me than I thought.

But how people found that, how leaders call that out was in really simple ways. That was just saying I see more leadership potential in you because you're so good at connecting with people or you're so good at staying calm in chaos. That is a really good quality for running this large division in a few years in our organization. Or don't underestimate the way that you have about interacting with people because that skill is more important than perhaps this sort of functional expertise that some of your other peers may

have more experience in. Because that quality is actually going to take you. It's going to leap frog you ahead. Using those type of things, they're pretty simple in terms of how they are delivered. As managers, we see these things in our teams all the time. We know what people's potential is, we just might not call it out. It's just the act of calling it out.

This is the other piece that's a little bit important - is that when we do call it out, we are what I call NATO about it. That's an acronym - Not Attached to Outcome. So we're not saying it to manipulate them into taking a job that we want them to take. We're just offering it. It's up to them to do what they want to with it. So there are no strings attached, it's just offered, and in that way calling our potential. It allows the other person to really own it for themselves.

Lori Murphy: You're listening to *Executive Edge*. I'm Lori Murphy. We are talking with Kristi Hedges, author of *The Inspiration Code*.

Kristi, we've discussed two of the four dimensions of what you call *The Inspiration Code*. The third dimension is to be passionate. How can leaders exhibit passion in a way that feels authentic to them? We already talked about authenticity and authentic to those who work for them especially those who are maybe less outgoing or gregarious by nature.

Kristi Hedges: Great, great question. Passion came up a lot in my discussions about inspirational leaders. I got curious about that because I thought what does that actually mean. You know, how do you get more passionate or how would you even go about that if somebody said, hey, you should be more passionate? Great. What do I do?

I ended up breaking that down based on the research. I broke passion down to three areas - energy, emotion, and conviction. So passion is energy, emotion, and conviction. So now we have something to work with a little bit. It matters because when you think about passion, it's like mood contagion which is say a well-documented phenomenon - which is that we pick up the emotion and the mood of other people in the room and we internalize that. And especially leaders. I mean our emotion is actually the strongest one in the group. People are paying more attention to us; therefore, they are more likely to pick up the emotional tailwinds that we have.

So part of being more passionate is just recognizing that this is an important realm to play in. What passion looks like doesn't have to be the same for each person. So your energy range might be different than my energy range in terms of what high energy or low energy looks like to each of us, but we still have a range. So we often think, well, I have this really narrow range. You know, I'm just not somebody who gets

worked up a lot. Well, you do but it just might look a little bit more narrow. It might look a little bit different for you. But people understand that about us, right? We know people who have sort of a flatter affect if you will. They tend to be more calm versus people who are very outgoing or gregarious and then they have a wider affect.

So a couple of things to think about. One is being able to match our energy to the occasion. So thinking about where do I want this group to be. If I want this group to be calm, I need to dial my dial down a little bit. I want to be a little calmer almost than they are because I'm trying to direct them and lead them. If I want this group to be excited, if I want this group to be worried, some of us we want our people to be a little riled up and we want them to see the importance of the situation, then I want my energy to lead them in that direction. So thinking about us as having a range and having a dial, and so setting it to a place that we want to take people to.

Same thing with emotion. We process in emotional terms. If we want to show more passion, we need to be comfortable in the emotional realm. This isn't new. Aristotle had a magic triangle which is that persuasive triangle or rhetorical triangle which had logos, logic; ethos, credibility; and pathos which is emotion. So understanding that there is an emotional

component to the communication that we have and understanding what we want that to be and how to express it is a good place to start.

Lori Murphy: What else do leaders need to focus on?

Kristi Hedges: Another thing that leaders can focus on there is showing conviction. That's the other piece of this. Conviction often just shows up in our bodies. There's no other way to put it. Part of it is body language. Part of it is sort of understanding how we come across and making sure we're in alignment with that. The example I'll give there is that, if there is an organization going through a change initiative and the leader is communicating that change, we want to see them talk about it. I want to see them. An email is not going to do it. We prefer to see them in front of us.

What's the reason for that? It's because we're reading them. We're reading them to see how much they care, do they believe this, are they nervous, are they excited. We're picking that up. So that's the idea behind conviction. So part of a leader's job. Again knowing the emotion we're trying to put in the room and then trying to align ourselves as we speak with that emotion is critical because otherwise we get a lot of cognitive dissonance. So we might be saying, hey, this change is going to be a big deal. But if we're looking really



squirmy up there and we're looking nervous, people aren't so sure that's the case.

Lori Murphy: Sure. What you're really talking about are nonverbals and how important nonverbal signals are to communicating. Many of us though aren't great necessarily at either reading nonverbals or more likely knowing that we're putting those out there. So how can we get better at knowing what our nonverbals are and interpreting other's nonverbals? Can you speak more about that?

Kristi Hedges: For us to work on our body language, there is clear research on a couple of things. The acronym I use is OUT which stands for open up and toward. That is in general it's better to be open because that allows people to want to hear what we have to say. Again we can close our arms for a second. We're reading in clusters so it's not a huge deal. But just kind of being open generally makes people more open to us.

Posture. There's a lot of research on posture. That we want to be up because when we're up there is an embodied cognition which is a loop going on essentially in our bodies which makes us feel more confident and other people more confident listening to us. Then toward which is we generally want to be toward people versus away from people. That's pretty much all you need to work on with your own body

language. We don't need a 10-point plan. No need to worry about every single thing. But it is important to be observant about it and then make sure that that's in alignment again with how we're trying to show up.

Lori Murphy: So let's turn to the final dimension of *The Inspiration Code*, be purposeful. How can we lead with purpose and help others find purpose in their work? We talked a little bit about this earlier, but I'd like you to expand a bit if you would.

Kristi Hedges: Sure. Again with a lot of this book, it's about bringing the ideas smaller. Right? We don't have to have some grand life purpose that's extremely clear to us that we communicate to everybody around us. But we can actually help people tie into more purpose in their work and more meaning in their work in smaller but incredibly impactful ways. Again in the research people told me, you know, this person is such a role model to me. I watched how they sort of lived their lives. I watched what their values were. They wore their values on the outside. They talked about their values. They talked about the importance of what they were doing and why it was meaningful to them. By the stories they told and by showcasing that, it helped me tap into what was purposeful for me.

Or they asked me questions. There's a series of questions that I use in the book that people often will use in one-to-ones or in development conversations with people. That helped them kind of get in touch with that idea about the meaning behind their work. So just being willing to engage in the conversation is a very powerful thing.

Lori Murphy: So if court leaders want to inspire those who work for them, Kristi, what would you say are the top three things you recommend that they do?

Kristi Hedges: First of all I'll say you should do whatever resonates for you because I am a big believer in you can do a couple of these things and it makes an impact and so you don't have to do everything. I think there are some real usefulness in doing things that you're excited to do. So something. You read a book or you hear some of this podcast and you say, you know what, I'm going to do more of that. Great, go do more of that.

If I were to say in the abstract the things that I think have the most impact right off the bat, the first one is to be present in the moment. Just noticing the level of distraction that you bring into conversations and minimizing that. It's better to have a 15-minute conversation that's uninterrupted, that's focused where you can really be there, than an hour of conversation were you're distracted and taking emails and

people are popping in your office. A lot of people cancel one-to-ones, I hear that a lot. Well, they had it. Then it went off the schedule. They had it and then it went off the schedule. My advice would be have a shorter meeting but have a real meeting. Be present in that moment because that's where inspiration is likely to happen.

The second thing would be to really listen with intent. Shift your listening. The easiest way to do that is just to get and stay curious. So to have that little voice in the back of your mind saying what else, right? What if I'm wrong? What else should I know? What's going on with this person? To ask those questions, it tends to change the conversation and change the dynamic. It sort of lay those little breadcrumbs for people to walk away feeling better more than or feeling that dose of inspiration.

Lori Murphy: That goes to, really we're talking about the nonverbals when you are in a face-to-face conversation and you're picking up some of those nonverbals, just acknowledging or maybe asking a question about what you're seeing.

Kristi Hedges: That's the easiest thing to do. I always tell people just say what you notice again without any strings attached. I notice when I said that that you smiled. What excited you about that? A couple of simple questions. Just

noticing and asking a question underneath of it shows a great point.

The third one is something we talked about quite a bit today, which is just calling out potential and doing it generously. So you already see it, just say it. Sometimes I hear people say, well, I feel if I do that too much it won't be meaningful anymore. I've just not seen that happen. If we call out a potential honestly, if we call it out with no strings attached, people generally feel good about that. That's something that again we can all do. It takes a minute at most. It doesn't really take any preparation. We're just calling out what we see. And of course, back to where we started, anybody can do that.

Lori Murphy: So anybody can do it but it is hard to be present, personal, passionate or purposeful when you're feeling burned out or overwhelmed. You even discussed a personal example of this in your book. So what are your tips for leaders who want to be inspirational but might be in a state of overwhelm or on the verge of burnout?

Kristi Hedges: I'm going to answer that in two ways. The first one is the short answer which, as I said earlier, you don't have to do everything. Right? I love the phrase do the next right thing. So if there are things that you feel like you could do or should do or have read the book and resonate or

just thinking about that day, just do the next right thing. So if it's having a 15-minute one-to-one because you don't have an hour but having it really be impactful, then do that. If it's calling out something you seem, then do that. If it's listening in a different way, then do that. If it's turning off your phone and putting it away and trying to have the best conversation you have, then do that. So just do the next right thing. Don't try to blow the ocean. I think sometimes things look too hard and so we don't do anything. Kind of a shutdown reflex.

The second thing I would say for people who are feeling burned out, and I am embarrassed to say this did not come to me until I was like three quarters of the way at least through the book, is that these same behaviors that inspire other people also inspire us. The other way to think about this is looking at this for yourself and saying if I'm not being present in conversations, I'm not probably going to be very inspired. If I don't have role models around me showing purpose, then maybe I need to get myself around some new people who'll help lift me up. If I don't have people in my life that I speak to regularly that help me see my potential, maybe I need to reconnect with some folks that I have let slip. So we also have to inspire ourselves to be able to go into the world and inspire other people.

Lori Murphy: So it comes as like putting your oxygen mask on first. Right?

Kristi Hedges: Yeah. Exactly. I mean even things like, you know, we talk about the idea of purpose. Doing a little bit of your own assessment on purpose. Am I really stepping into my own purpose? Am I reconnecting with what's meaningful for me right now? Just taking some of that reflection time to do that can help us. Again we feel it more and then we role model it for other people.

Lori Murphy: So, Kristi, is there anything else you'd like to share with our audience today?

Kristi Hedges: Well, you know people will often say or ask me how writing this book about inspirations impacted your life. It has impacted pretty much everything. I think I talked about some things that are on top of mind for me the most, but certainly I listen differently and I think about being present very differently. I think about my energy very differently. I think about purpose differently and potential. But what I love about all of this is that the same stuff that works for us in our work life, it works for us at home. I use this stuff with my kids frequently, and my friends. I think about how I listen to them differently. I think about if I notice purpose or potential in somebody I'm just generous to say it because, why not? So it's those kinds of things. I

think we can think even more broadly about how we show up in this inspirational way because it's actually a way of being in the world. If you feel like, wow, I wish I had more people around me like this, then you can be the person. You can be the one that's around other people that inspires them.

Lori Murphy: Almost like exercising that muscle on a regular basis will allow you to use it where it's just second nature.

Kristi Hedges: It's a virtuous cycle, right?

Lori Murphy: Right.

Kristi Hedges: We say these things and they come back to us many times over. Back to anybody can be inspirational to anyone, I think the other thing that we should sort of break out of the mold of is who is inspirational to whom. We often think that if you need to be a senior leader, being inspirational to a young mentor and work, generations have so much to teach each other. I hear in private conversations and coaching a lot how important it is for people who have been in the workplace who might be wondering am I doing a good job with this next generation, am I coaching them well, am I managing them well to also have them feel - for the people who are midlevel in their career or even just getting started - that it's also okay to consider yourself capable inspiring people who are more senior than you. In fact, it's a human condition.



You know what makes us feel more than. Is it really restricted to the age that we are or the position that we hold?

Lori Murphy: Kristi, this has been fascinating and fun. I really appreciate you sharing your research and your insights with us today.

Kristi Hedges: Thank you so much, Lori. I so appreciate you having me.

Michael Siegel: Thanks, Lori, and thanks to our listening audience as well. If you're interested in learning more about Kristi Hedges and her book *The Inspiration Code: How the Best Leaders Energize People Every Day*, visit the Executive Education page on [fjc.dcn](http://fjc.dcn) and click or tap on *Executive Edge* Podcast.

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