



## GOING BEYOND THE PIG AND THE APE: MAKING MINDFUL CHOICES TO CONNECT PEOPLE, PASSION AND PURPOSE

*Throughout our technologically advanced and connected society, many Americans are running on fumes. Whether on the job or at home, we're taking on more and working even harder at a time when the economy continues to struggle, and political leaders cannot see eye to eye. Despite gloomy outlooks, there are starting points and resources to help authentic leaders utilize mindful practices in the classroom, boardroom, hospitals and the frontlines across industries. In this issue of the Authentic Leadership Series, I talk with author and former Chief Operating Officer and Coach of Waldron Wealth Management, Krishna Pendyala about his work to help "the driven and restless" make wiser choices and his unexpected partnership with U.S. Congressman, Tim Ryan to help build a mindful nation.*

**Q: You've mentioned how you stumbled upon Congressman Ryan's writings and work. Can you share how your own work led you to this intersection?**

*Krishna:* I published my first book in 2011. It was written for the personal development and business audiences, but it resonated most with the mindfulness audience. Interestingly, I had chosen to stay away from the word "mindfulness" in my book as a quick Google search would bring pages of results steeped in religious connotations. And I knew early on that I didn't want to approach the topic of self-awareness with an association to religion. Then last year I received a chapter of Congressman Tim Ryan's book, "A Mindful Nation." I immediately connected with it and I tried reaching out to him. However, I couldn't reach him directly since I wasn't in his Ohio district and I couldn't send a direct email. Not too long after, while attending a Mindfulness in Education conference, I happened to cross

paths with Congressman Ryan having been introduced to him by the folks at the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts. Over a dinner conversation, I went from being unable to send him an email, to openly collaborating on ideas to convert the Rust Belt between Pittsburgh and Cleveland into a "Mindful Tech Belt." Over the next few months, we continued the conversation and converged on our shared dream to build a mindful nation by creating a foundation. I was surprised when he followed up by saying, "Krishna, I want you to run the initiative." At that point, it became ultra-clear that this project would

serve as a vehicle to connect people, passion and purpose in an intentional and conscious way—elements which are necessary to building a mindful nation.

**Q: What were your first impressions of Congressman Ryan's vision and the potential impact it could have on local communities?**

*Krishna:* What's ironic is that I'm not political at all. In fact, I generally dislike politics and much of the dysfunction we experience across the sociopolitical and economic landscape of our country—not to mention the extended

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international communities. So, intersecting with Congressman Ryan couldn't have been further off my radar screen. What's funny is that I actually shared my feelings about politicians with him. The three seconds of waiting for his reaction felt like an eternity until he responded with a smile, "You and about 90 percent of the country, Krishna." His sense of humor gave me a greater appreciation of him as a person. And that hasn't changed. His humanity, humility and level of self-awareness become increasingly self-evident the more I work with him. His vision for inner calm and awareness isn't Pollyannaish, and the timing is perfect in that we are discussing these issues at such a pivotal moment in our nation's history. His heart and vision are in the right place and collaborating with Congressman Ryan turbo-charges the work I've been doing over the past few years. It gives me hope that there are enough businessmen and women, teachers, first responders, parents and others to tip the scale toward a transformative culture change where inner wisdom empowers people to thrive in harmony. You know, it's really no different than what change agents are doing every day in their companies, homes and organizations. Except that the work that we are doing around a mindful nation—or whatever the right terminology may be—offers a larger movement or context to which we may connect both individual and community efforts.

**Q: Mindfulness and awareness: how do you explain the essence of these concepts?**

*Krishna:* Mindfulness to me means being aware and present in whatever you do. There are many different practices that can help you reach a state of mindfulness. However, I see it as being much broader in the everyday sense of the English definition of the word: *mindful, attentiveness, courtesy and awareness*. I think mindful living should start with the acknowledgement that the current path many of us are on is a slippery slope. *We're all working too hard.* We're continuously connected, and we don't take the time to relax and rejuvenate. If you listen with full attention to people today, they're telling us that there's not enough time to spend and cultivate the most important relationships in their lives. *We're so busy doing things—and for what?* The path we're on is not a sustainable model and is not going to serve us well in the long run. Therefore, how do you retreat to

reflect and evaluate your day and determine what's important to you? Which vantage point is driving us? My contention is that predominately most of us are inadvertently driven by fear. Fear becomes a driving force, then greed, and if you can manage them, then it's your pride and ego. That's where the concepts from my book, "Beyond the PIG and the APE: Realizing SUCCESS and true HAPPINESS," come from.

**Q: Can you briefly explain what the PIG and the APE are and how understanding these concepts can help us avoid the destructive habits caused by them?**

*Krishna:* The PIG and the APE are hidden human drives. They are acronyms, but also relate to behavior of the animals they represent. The PIG is our drive to Pursue Instant Gratification and the APE represents our drive to Avoid Painful Experiences. Both of these drives are innate and historically they've helped to feed and protect us. The problem is that over time these great strengths started to become two of our

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greatest weaknesses resulting in self-sabotage, destructive habits and failed attempts at advancement, success and happiness. Through these concepts, I offer a simple solution: *awareness*. Awareness, application and patience are some of the cornerstone skills that limit the influence that the PIG and the APE can have on our pursuit of personal and professional happiness and fulfillment, and the formation of healthy and productive relationships on the job and at home.

**Q: Awareness seems to be an important ingredient for success. How do we become more self-aware?**

*Krishna:* Different strokes for different folks—there are multiple pathways that can be examined to arrive at your own state of awareness. Despite these many options that spark mindful thought that can lead to

change, it's ultimately an individual journey. It often comes from wisdom or something that is reflected in nature and it takes exercise, practice and discipline to stay centered or grounded. In society today, we're all conditioned to look externally for answers. We want instant recipes for success, but the process is an individual pursuit and we all need time to reflect, transform and grow. Unfortunately, reflection is considered esoteric in many organizations and that's why we don't do it enough. But, no matter what industry sector we work in, all of us are in the *people business*. While I am not in the healthcare industry, what I'm talking about is healing people holistically, which is something we've forgotten entirely. Every organization needs people and knows that it needs to take care of them. But, how do organizations commonly treat their people? We define them as human capital, numbers, representations of process, but not as "people." They're viewed through an economic lens, rather than a humanistic one. We have to get out of the habit of thinking of people purely as a return on

investment (ROI) as if saying humans are only a cost. When you default to those perspectives, you're actually looking at only extracting from people rather than in terms of helping them through a symbiotic relationship that is mutually beneficial.

Whether it's education, nonprofit or corporate organizations—many of the interpersonal challenges that we face are the result of a battle of egos. As leaders, how do we get along with and inspire people to come together and collaborate? First, we must have clarity of vision, but where does that leadership come from—is it out of fear or greed? In my work, I'm trying to challenge the root motivations by going to and helping transform the source at the leadership level and create a new story—a collective story based on the whole.

There's an interesting story that I like to use to illustrate how different two perspectives can be regarding what at face-value appears to be a straightforward and singular experience. It's a parable—an argument if you will—between a bird and a fish describing what a boat looks like. The two will never agree. Unless the bird dives under the water to view the boat and the fish jumps into the air, they will have two contrasting perspectives of the boat. Now, let me ask you a question. *Who is right?* Both views are accurate in their own right, but they're both derived from limited perspectives. If you were an artist attempting to paint a picture of the boat, you'd need to integrate the story of the bird *and* the fish to see the boat in its entirety. Whether its politics, business or leadership, we as leaders often fail to understand the whole picture and aren't open to integrating multiple perspectives.

**Q: What's on the horizon for you?**

*Krishna:* I'm meeting leaders across industries to explore what they need and perceive as important components of a sustainable, mindful nation. For this to work, we need to provide an inclusive model that resonates with a broad spectrum of communities. It's important that we're completely transparent and that we include others in the dialogue to ensure that people are engaged with everything including the name, "mindful nation." Transparency includes inviting diverse audiences to the conversation so that the initiative is authentic and organically rooted in the critical issues facing our communities. For example, we're concerned about our veterans, and we're looking for solutions to help alleviate high suicide rates and to mitigate the effects of PTSD. Over in the educational field, we're promoting approaches to empower teachers to reduce their own stress and help children with techniques to pay attention. In corporate organizations, we're looking for ways to reduce burnout and provide holistic leadership frameworks.

**Q: Are there any resources you'd like to suggest for our readers to learn more about your work and collaboration with Congressman Ryan?**

*Krishna:* "A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Improve Performance, and Recapture the American Spirit" by Tim Ryan is an excellent starting point. I consider it to be a guidebook that refers to many other approaches to the philosophy of awareness and how to make more mindful choices. For personal empowerment, I encourage readers to read, "Beyond the PIG and the APE: Realizing SUCCESS and true HAPPINESS," and my blog, MindfulChoices.org. They touch on simple approaches to enhance self-awareness and the connection of people, passion and purpose.



**Krishna Pendyala**  
*Featured Guest*

Krishna Pendyala ([www.krishnapendyala.com](http://www.krishnapendyala.com)) is an unconventional life coach and workshop leader who uses a playful framework to empower people to make wiser choices in life. His critically acclaimed book, "Beyond the PIG and the APE: Realizing SUCCESS and true HAPPINESS," illuminates how to be aware of the hidden drives that influence us. He inspires people to reach within to solve their own problems. For over twenty years, he has transformed both individuals and teams at Boeing, Carnegie Mellon, the Pittsburgh Steelers, and UNESCO using his simple, yet practical framework distilled from his varied life experiences. His transformational approach has been featured in TEDx, The New York Times, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and Inc. magazine. He shares his insights on his blog, MindfulChoices.org. Today, Krishna is also spearheading the Mindful Nation Foundation—the brainchild initiative of Congressman Tim Ryan, author of "A Mindful Nation." Krishna is also the Chief Empowerment Officer of Tetra Advisors, a talent engagement firm to help financial advisors fuel their growth by focusing on the human element of their businesses. Krishna lives in Pittsburgh with his wife and two children.



**Michelle Maldonado**  
*Series Creator*

Michelle Maldonado is a former corporate attorney with more than 17 years of leadership experience in strategic planning, operations and partnership development across the e-learning, technology and online media industries. She currently serves as Associate Vice President of Corporate and Strategic Relationships for American Public University (APU) and is the creator and editor of The Authentic Leadership Series. Michelle is passionate about talent development, coaching and the mentoring of professionals to support organizational success and sustainability. Utilizing an authentic and consultative approach, Michelle collaborates with industry organizations to form education alliances that support overall talent and institutional growth strategies. She also represents APU in conferences and other venues on the topic of leadership authenticity and its convergence with emotional intelligence, mindfulness and other "conscious leadership" practices that inspire culture transformation. Michelle's work has been featured in Chief Learning Officer, Human Capital Insights, Leadership Excellence, and Training magazines.

To learn more about how American Public University's programs and services may help you with your talent development and retention strategies, please visit: [www.StudyAtAPU.com/Solutions](http://www.StudyAtAPU.com/Solutions) or contact Michelle at [mmaldonado@apus.edu](mailto:mmaldonado@apus.edu).



**James Thompson**  
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James Thompson is Senior Writer and Content Strategist at American Public University with more than 16 years' experience as a communications leader, marketing copywriter and creative author. He draws insights from his executive experience leading human resources and corporate communications, and recruitment and talent management programs for Fortune 500 organizations.

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