

Doug Smith ([00:06](#)):

What's up, leader, and welcome to episode number 346 of the L3 Leadership Podcast, where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith and I am your host, and today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Tongue Advisors. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I'm so glad that you're here, and I hope that you enjoy our content and become a subscriber. Know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channel as well. So make sure you're subscribed there. And if you've been listening to us for a while and we've impacted your life, it would mean the world to me. If you'll leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcast or Spotify, or whatever app you listen to podcast through, that really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders.

Doug Smith ([00:44](#)):

So thank you in advance for that. Well Leader in today's episode, you'll hear my conversation with Kadi Cole. And if you're unfamiliar with Kadi, let me just tell you a little bit about her. She's one of the most experienced authorities and organizational and leadership development in the church today. She has a background in executive leadership at one of the largest multi-site churches in America and a master's degree in human resource development. And as a result, she offers practical strategies and insights that are relevant and easily applicable to the present day church culture. Katie helps individuals and teams uncover and fulfill their God-given purpose with more effectiveness and joy through her international work. As an organizational consultant, leadership trainer, and life plan facilitator as one of the first female leaders to serve in an executive role at a large multi-site church. Katie is a founding member of the Women's Executive Pastor Network, author of developing female leaders and founder of ministry check.com.

Doug Smith ([01:34](#)):

She also works with churches to create environments in which female leaders can be fully developed, thrive in their calling, and help fulfill the mission of the church. Motivational and inspirational and always approachable. Kadi tell, tell It like it is attitude is a refreshing approach that allows her to authentically connect with those aspiring to go to their next level of leadership and impact. And in our conversation, you'll hear Katie talk about all things developing female leaders. She talks about how to develop your leadership voice in your first 90 days. And of course, we take her through the lightning round. You're gonna love this interview. But before we dive in, just a few announcements. This episode of the L three Leadership Podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors. The financial advisors at Beratung Advisors help educate and empower clients to make informed financial decisions. You can find out how Beratung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website [Beratungadvisors.com](#).

Doug Smith ([02:27](#)):

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to the L three Leadership Podcast. I've been following you for a while and I'm so excited to have you on, and you, over the years, have developed a passion for helping organizations develop female leaders and also helping female leaders develop in their leadership. And so can you just tell us why is that a passion of yours and kind of give us some background on that journey.

Kadi Cole ([03:25](#)):

Sure. Well, thank you so much for having me on the show. I'm a mutual fan, so this is really exciting. Uh, you know what, I'm actually kind of a surprise, uh, passion person for this topic. I, it hasn't been something that I've really, uh, dug into much, which I know surprises a lot of people because I am a woman leader. Uh, but I've been a little bit more focused on just leading well and didn't really kind of think about this topic as being such an important one as it is, uh, until I started consulting with businesses and churches who were mostly, primarily, uh, dominated by men in leadership circles. And we found that we were really having a hard time reaching their, their goals, their mission statement, their vision, um, what they were trying to accomplish with their businesses because they didn't have enough leaders. And women were a key factor in changing that. And so it's become a real passion for me because it has such an important outcome to us as leaders and the effectiveness of our organizations as well as sort of the, um, I think the, the moral part of it or the, uh, justice part of it I think is important too. But for me, I actually came to it because it just makes us better organizations when we're developing female leaders as well as we're developing male leaders.

Doug Smith ([04:34](#)):

Yeah. And so as a result of this passion in, in your view, you actually wrote a book called Developing Female Leaders. And can you just give us the brief overview of why you write the book and who specifically was the target audience for this?

Kadi Cole ([04:45](#)):

Yeah. The, the specific target was really churches, uh, churches and pastors of churches who were men who were trying to do a better job with the women on their team. And part of this came because, uh, like I said, we were sort of bumping into this issue on the organizational's part as I was consulting with churches and businesses. Uh, but then I was meeting these great leaders, particularly pastors who were godly men, who knew that the Lord had brought leadership gifts to their congregation or their staff team, or even their own personal family. And they were sorta tripping over how to do a good job with these women. And they were, they meant well, they were trying hard, they were actually putting a lot of effort into it, but the things that they were doing as they would describe it to me, weren't really as great as they thought they were <laugh> and they meant well, but their efforts, um, really were probably missing the Mark A. Little bit.

Kadi Cole ([05:35](#)):

And then as I started working with their churches or businesses and also working with the women on their team, it was, it was very true and very clear that what these great guy leaders were intending to, uh, offer and send in terms of messaging to the women on their team was not the message or the next steps that women were receiving at all. And sort of that chasm between what these great guys were doing, doing and what these women were looking for, that chasm to me just felt wrong, particularly in the kingdom. And so I wanted to help bridge that gap and provide some information, some language, some next steps to help us get closer together so we could work and lead together to fulfill the missions that God had given us.

Doug Smith ([06:13](#)):

Yeah, so good. And, and for all leaders, no matter what the situation, oftentimes we have good intent, but as you mentioned, the impact isn't always what we want it to be, but unless we actually become aware of the impact we're making, we can't make changes, which is, you know, why I think it's so great that you wrote this. Can you just, you actually start off the book with a, uh, I shouldn't say it's hilarious, but a quote that was said to you is off it's funny now where, where it's just, yeah, it's funny now, not funny then, but can you give some examples, maybe even starting with that of just things that leaders may not even think of when they say but have a, a, a negative impact or even some behaviors that organizations do that they may not think of, but again, impact women in a negative way.

Kadi Cole ([06:53](#)):

Sure. Well, uh, the story that I start off with in the book is kind of a funny one. Uh, when I reflect back on it, I was, uh, had just graduated from college. Uh, I had moved to South Florida where I live now, and had my first job as a nurse. And I was volunteering at my church, like as a full fledged adult, right? I wasn't like, you know, I wasn't a kid, I wasn't a teenager, I wasn't like in college, kind of, you know, figuring my life out. I was like, I was a member. I tied because I actually earn money. And now I was volunteering and I was single. So I was a part of the singles ministry and we were having this big barbecue picnic thing, and I was working the name tag table. And this guy came up who was quite a bit older than me, um, and, uh, got his name tag and, you know, I was trying to be, you know, friendly and chipper. And he looked at me and he goes, you have really great birthing hips. And I was just like,

Doug Smith ([07:43](#)):

Geez,

Kadi Cole ([07:44](#)):

What, what? Like, I don't know how to like, thank you, or I'm not sure what to say to that. And uh, it was one of those moments where I just, I didn't, I was like, is this Florida? Is this the church I'm at? Like, did I do something wrong to make this happen? Um, and so it just is such a great example that I have had that same kind of feeling multiple times in ministry, even as I've grown in my formal leadership roles of just, uh, interacting with people and having inappropriate things said, or, uh, you mentioned like people trying to do things that would help me, that, that really weren't, like I remembered preaching my first message. Um, and a woman came up to me afterwards and was like, you know, it was so hard to hear what you really had to say because your pants are so cute.

Kadi Cole ([08:25](#)):

And I kept wondering, where did you get those? And I was just like, oh, you missed my whole message. Cuz you were like, I, I looked too cute on stage. Is that what you're trying to tell me? So if you talk to any woman in ministry, they will also have a list of stories like this that are, and I'm sure guys have their version of it too, but for women, uh, when we don't have a lot of role models or we haven't seen a lot of women lead before, or we don't really know how this is supposed to work, it's, it's hard to know how to respond to those things. It can kind of throw you off your game or throw your confidence off. Um, so in, in the book, I try to really sort of shine a light on what are those commonalities, those common things that we do as leaders or maybe that happen in our culture that we can do a better job shaping, um, many times kind of those awkward, inappropriate moments or things that might dissuade a leader, uh, from stepping forward in her giftedness.

Kadi Cole ([09:15](#)):

There're oftentimes unintentional, there are very few people who are out there trying to limit women using their gifts in their church in the kingdom, but we accidentally do things all the time. So I talk in the book about eight best practices that churches or individual leaders can do to kind of move their team forward. Um, and so one of them is to really take a close look at what are we saying, either intentionally or unintentionally. I challenge a lot of leaders to kind of survey or audit their weekend service and just ask themselves or ask some women to give them feedback. And we found all sorts of things. When I work with churches on this, like unintentionally can go six or seven weeks and not have one woman on the stage. And most of these guys are shocked when I start kind of showing these data points to them and they're like, we have women leading all over, we always have women on the platform, but they don't even realize that you could go a long time without one woman in the band or one woman singing a song or one woman holding a microphone.

Kadi Cole ([10:11](#)):

And, uh, you know, I think part of this for me is I've grown up in very conservative theological spaces. I've, um, been a part of more progressive things for me. It's not so much a theological issue. There are a lot of debates and challenges about that. I'm gonna let the theologians handle that conversation. I'm more interested in helping people be clear on what their theology is and then lead fully into that. So if you have some jobs in your church that are not invited or welcome for women to take senior pastor or elder, um, then there are hundreds of roles that actually women can fill in that kind of theology. And unfortunately, a lot of times our cultures or these unintended messages dissuade women from doing even the roles we would want them to do. And so that's really my focus is what are those areas we want women to be serving as leaders, and how can we make sure we aren't accidentally sending the wrong message on the weekend or in our language or, uh, just by unintentionally uh, highlighting more men than women we're sending an unintended message.

Doug Smith ([11:10](#)):

Yeah. And, and this is huge, you know, self-awareness is such a huge issue for leaders in general and organizations. And so if a leader's listening to this in their organization, and maybe they have the assumption that they do a great job of developing female leaders, but now they're listening to this and say, wait a minute. Like I, I don't know. How can organizations, what would you recommend? Do they need to bring in a third party consultant like yourself? Do they need to, to do a small group with women in the organization and ask what would you recommend them doing to become aware?

Kadi Cole ([11:37](#)):

Well, I think any of those strategies can work for sure. Uh, in the book I really try to lay out what are some great and easy next steps to do that. So one of the first ones is to simply kind of be open and ask some female leaders in your congregation or on, on your staff team, what's it like to be a female leader here? Like, how's that going? What's it like to be a female leader under my leadership? And be really open to the answer because chances are she has some experiences or has, uh, assumed some things or misinterpreted your intent somewhere and is having a very different experience than probably you imagine she's having or even intended for her to have. It takes a lot of courage to ask that question, to be really honest, because, uh, no one is very good at this.

Kadi Cole ([12:25](#)):

What we found in our research wow, for the book is that, uh, no matter where you're at on the theological spectrum, no matter what kind of ministry you have in terms of vision or mission size, location in the country, denominational affiliation, we pretty much stink at developing female leaders all across the board. So I think it's good to assume that we all have a lot to learn in this. In fact, one of the most amazing pieces of the research experience for me was to realize how many biases I had against women in my own leadership mm-hmm. <affirmative> even biases I had against myself. And part of that is because I've grown up in ministry leadership along with all of my male peers, and we've been handed the same kind of instructions. We've been mentored in the same kinds of practices, we've heard the same horrible pastor jokes from the platform my entire life.

Kadi Cole ([13:10](#)):

Like we, we all are enculturated in this culture and we're all contributors and we also are all recipients of that culture. And so part of it is we all have to own ways that we have maybe, uh, overlooked women or any other minority for that fact. Um, habits and practices that we've been groomed in that are no longer serving us or the culture or the people we're trying to reach, it is, it is not for the faint of heart to begin asking these questions, but it is an important question to ask. And it is the way we begin to really, uh, crack open our unique, uh, culture that we've created at our individual church or business.

Doug Smith ([13:47](#)):

Yeah. And that's so good. As a, as a next step. And you know, you mentioned that really you're passionate in the beginning was just leadership development, just how can I become a better leader? And most leaders and organizations have a huge focus on leadership development. It's what they think about all the time. Um, what, what are some steps that they can actually take? Is it much different than the way they generally think about developing leaders? Or what are some next steps they can take to say, okay, I've received the feedback that we're not doing this well in our organization. How do we move forward so we can start developing you and developing the women on staff?

Kadi Cole ([14:19](#)):

If you're really trying to make a dent in this, uh, the first thing to do is take a little bit of an audit of your HR systems or volunteer based systems and just actually look at the numbers. And the reason I encourage people to start there is you can't I uh, you know, data doesn't lie, <laugh>. And so if you took a look at your highest level leadership levels, your mid-level leadership levels, your entry level leadership levels, and your volunteer leadership roles, and just said how many, what's the percentage? How many men and women do we have at each level? Most organizations, particularly in North North America experience what is called the broken rung, which is where you see women at 50 50 percentages in volunteer roles. Oftentimes, women actually are the majority of volunteers and entry level leadership roles. And then, uh, somewhere along the ladder as they climb, there's a broken rung.

Kadi Cole ([15:06](#)):

It's usually mid-level managers where women aren't invited into that leadership or for some reason they don't take the step of leadership. And you can see it in the numbers. Uh, I would say if you looked at your highest level leadership team and it's all men, chances are you've got a broken, wrong situation in your pipeline and then it's time to go digging. Why is that? Are we not inviting women? Are we doing something to dissuade them? Do they not know that we want them there? Are we inadvertently recruiting people who all look and act like us, which tend to be a bunch of other white men? And we're, we're kind of building an affinity base when it comes to leadership levels. All of those things are sort of

the inadvertent, unaware pieces of our leadership pipelines and cultures that if we look at the data we can really take a look at and, and shift.

Kadi Cole ([15:53](#)):

And then once you know it, once you know where the dropoff is, then you start attacking that level. And so, uh, asking the questions, looking at the systems, having some goals, we wanna make sure that 30% of our next class of leadership development or the next round of hires we do, we have 30% of the candidates are women, or 30% of our volunteer training has women in the room and we don't have it. If we don't have that kind of percentage, just hold yourself to some really high standards. That's the way to move it forward.

Doug Smith ([16:21](#)):

That's so good. So really it's just like everything else in leadership development's, becoming aware of issues and actually developing an intentional plan to do something about it. It's so good. Uh, I heard you talk about this on a podcast and I would love, I love what you said on it, and so I'd love to talk about it here. Um, a lot of women, you know, at least early on in their career, they start working and then they get married and they wanna have a family and they start a family. And women and men too have this tension of, I wanna win at home and I wanna win at work. And I know there's a big tension there. Can you just talk about what should organizational be leaders be thinking specifically when it comes to developing female leaders who wanna start a family or who are raising a young family or even, you know, teenagers?

Kadi Cole ([17:01](#)):

Well, I think the most important thing is to be able to talk about it and, uh, and really as employees, that's our job to be able to talk about the kinds of things I wanna do with my career, the kinds of goals I have, the ways I wanna be able to, um, organize myself or contribute. Um, and I think part of the challenge is there are some legalities around this and that this would be one thing I'd wanna raise particularly to people in ministry who sometimes aren't as familiar, uh, with the legal ramifications of discrimination against gender and parenting. But we do it a lot and I talk with a lot of pastors who kind of wear their pastoral hat, um, when they're working with a young female leader who's looking at having a family or they're assuming she is, and they tend to overlook her for promotions.

Kadi Cole ([17:45](#)):

Um, I've had, uh, pastors tell me that, uh, we, we actually actually had this great role for her, but we knew she was thinking about having a baby and we didn't wanna put pressure on her where she would have to choose between, you know, doing something for the church or having a child. And so we just, uh, thought we'd come back in a few years and see if she's interested, then well, that is, uh, unfair, that is illegal. It's disrespectful to her, but it really misses the opportunity to let her know that you see something more in her, that you have an opportunity and she gets to make the choice for herself whether or not she wants to take that job or whether she wants to negotiate and say, Hey, is there any way I could do that part-time while I have my kids? Or is there a way I can contribute at a higher leadership level than I'm doing now and still be able to manage these other things?

Kadi Cole ([18:26](#)):

There are, uh, so many ways to thrive as a parent and an, and a leader at the same time. Uh, there's as many options as we wanna give people. I really encourage people to start thinking through those

options and I really encourage, uh, team leaders and pastors particularly to be open handed with how that might work. Uh, it doesn't always have to be full-time Monday through Friday or six days a week around ministry. There's ways to leverage sort of the best of your people and give flexibility. I actually think the pandemic and, uh, virtual working and the flexibility that we had to build into our, uh, teams functioning has been a real asset for women who tend to thrive in those, uh, less structured, less, uh, kind of controlled environments.

Doug Smith ([19:12](#)):

So, good. And again, it just comes back to awareness, having intentional conversations and actually working through a plan, which is what leaders do every day. But this is so good that you're bringing this to everyone's attention. Um,

Kadi Cole ([19:23](#)):

There's, I I will just say if I can, Doug, um, you know, this is a really big hot topic. It is hard to talk about. And so I do, I do just wanna, just wanna kinda, uh, let all the leaders out there know who are like, oh, this is like every other leadership thing. There is something harder about this one. It's more emotional. There's, uh, if you're in ministry, there's a lot of theological debate around it. People take it very personally. Um, when you look at the research, it really is based on our own leadership habits, and so it's personal for us also as well as for the women we're trying to develop. And so, um, just acknowledging that I found has been the best thing to be able to sit down and say, Hey, I wanna have a conversation about something, but this is probably gonna be awkward and I actually don't know how to have this conversation well, and so can I just have permission to accidentally put my foot in my mouth or say something really ignorant and just know that I don't mean to be doing that. I'm trying to learn and this is me learning and I need your help to get better at this. We, we all need to get better at this. That's one of the reasons why we're so behind in it, is that we haven't figured out how to talk about it and push through the awkwardness.

Doug Smith ([20:28](#)):

Yeah, that no, that's such a good point that it is challenging. They are hard conversations, but clearly it, it sounds like it's worth it. And so thank you for, for that. Um, another area that could be challenging to talk through and work through is, is pay. And so I know there's been a lot of talk about a gap between the pay between what men make and women make. And I know you have a lot, a lot of thoughts on this as well. How can organizations take an honest assessment and start to see if they're paying fairly and, and think through that?

Kadi Cole ([20:54](#)):

Yeah, again, this is a great, uh, first early step to take because you can't disagree with the numbers, right? We pay people what we pay them. And so, uh, what I try to encourage people to do is kind of pop the hood on their HR systems and see, uh, where are our equity basis. And, uh, I work with a lot of multi-site churches because that's part of my experience in ministry and it's really easy to see in those areas. And I would just encourage, uh, leaders to look at more about the impact and the value someone's bringing their span of leadership versus male, female, or even if you have different titles like pastors and directors, um, to think more in terms of what's the actual leadership they're giving in your church. So it's not uncommon for me to work with a multi-site church and have one campus that's got a student pastor, a student ministries pastor who's got 20 or 25 students under his leadership in a growing campus in another campus.

Kadi Cole ([21:47](#)):

We have a children's ministry director who's at a larger campus and has maybe 250 kids under their leadership and, you know, a good 50 to 75 volunteers to keep that ministry running. It's very common that the student pastor is actually getting paid significantly more, even though his span of care and his leadership team and the number of families he's impacting is quite less. And the reason that happens is because, uh, we tend to pay men more in the marketplace, it's about 80 cents to the dollar for men for the same work and education level. In the ministry world, it's even worse. We pay about 72 cents to the dollar for men. Um, uh, so just the way we pay them. The other thing is when we give the title pastor, a lot of times we give a lot more benefits. We contribute more to their retirement, we, uh, give them better insurance.

Kadi Cole ([22:37](#)):

So a lot of times we'll cover insurance for their whole family, whereas a director might have to pay extra to cover her husband and children. Uh, so that's a very significant benefit. Um, the kind of what I call the fringe benefits of church, uh, male pastors or anyone with the pastor title tends to get a lot more gifts from the congregation than people with the director title. Uh, as leaders we can help influence that. And then finally, uh, people in ministry do get a housing allowance benefit on their taxes that usually we easily give to people who have the pastor title or maybe have been to seminary, but we wouldn't give to a female director even if she has high levels of seminary training. And that, um, that housing allowance, which is, has very low standards from the government's concern in terms of what qualifies you for it. But it's up to us as churches to educate people about that benefit and that gives them thousands of dollars back in their pocket every single year. So those are several ways. It's not just one dimensional, it's all of those dimensions really taking a look at that and measuring to make sure that you're giving equal pay for equal work.

Doug Smith ([23:40](#)):

That's so good. And I heard you mentioned another podcast too, just a, a simple bias or or assumption that the leaders can make in hiring, which I never thought about, but you said, you know, sometimes leaders will look at someone and be like, oh, we're trying to hire this person and decide their salary, but we know their husband or their wife, they make a ton of money. Can you talk about that? I thought that was interesting insight.

Kadi Cole ([23:59](#)):

Oh, yeah. Well, I think in ministry, especially if you've grown up in a church that's like on the grow or from a church plant or, um, we kind of, when you're first planting a church, you have no money, right? So you're trying to just leverage volunteers and then if you're trying to pay someone, you're trying to give them as much as you can, but it's probably not enough to do it. And then you hire your second guy and he's got six kids and a stay at home wife, so you gotta pay him more. So things are very unequitable. Um, in the early days, those habits and mindsets tend to stay with us even as we grow into healthier, more robust, more financially stable organizations. And so I just really wanna challenge people that that isn't an appropriate way to, when you have a full staff and you're doing consistent hiring, that's not an appropriate way to look at what you pay someone.

Kadi Cole ([24:45](#)):

We really need to switch that conversation from what can we barely afford and what can we scrape by to what is someone's worth, what is their value, and how do we make that equitable? And so a part of

that is looking at their family dynamics. It's very common in the early days of a ministry for someone with a lot of kids to get more money than someone with no kids or only one child because their, their quote needs are more. And I would say, again, that is not a healthy way to look at, um, salary <laugh> implications. I understand it, but it's not something you wanna live with for very long and probably shouldn't expose yourself from a liability standpoint to that anyway. But we do do that. And so, um, it's uh, much more common for women to get lower paid salaries because of the income that their husband makes.

Kadi Cole ([25:28](#)):

Um, I've been in many conversations where that is the factor taken in. I say, pay her what she's worth and if they don't need it, let them tie back to the church. I know a lot of women who tied their entire salary, their executive level directors and pastors, they tie their entire salary. It still gives the value, it still puts you in compliance with all of the HR laws, and it allows her to be able to give generously back to her church. Um, what's interesting is that when a husband, or when you have a wife that makes a lot of money, most uh, male pastors will hire male pastors and give them a salary that matches or exceeds their wife because they believe it's important for a man to make more. So again, we have all these kind of double standards that have sort of been handed down for us or we feel like we can spiritualize that really are, uh, unfair and unequitable and illegal that we need to make sure we're not doing. And I would just say, again, I've worked with a lot of pastors and a lot of elder boards, and when we look at these, they are shocked to find out this is happening under their leadership. Most people are just unaware at the systems and the structures in their system. So I would encourage everyone if you serve in that at the executive level, senior pastor level elder board, to just ask the question and get a report and see if there's anything you can do to make it a more fair and equitable system.

Doug Smith ([26:44](#)):

This is so good Katie, and I hope leaders are listening to this and their eyes are, are opening really, really big and saying, I gotta, I gotta go back and check on this and do something. Uh, the last thing I wanna focus on from your book, developing Female Leaders is, is creating a safe space. And again, I heard you talk about this, I thought you shared so many good things. Uh, I heard you say that we need to reeducate people on relationships and how they should work in the workplace. And I think you said John Ortberg shared with you a few different views on, on how to view relationship in the workplace. Can you share those? I thought that was so enlightening.

Kadi Cole ([27:13](#)):

Uh, yeah. I think probably the overarching theme is this idea that we need to remember that we're we're brothers and sisters in the Lord, particularly, um, in churches. That's the language we would use in the workplace. We would work peers and coworkers, and there are certain professional boundaries and safeties that need to come with it, particularly in churches. Uh, I think there is a lot of fear, which I agree with that one of the things that will shake a church down or take a leader down is if there's, uh, sexual indiscretion. And so being mindful of that, being cautious of that, protecting our families, all of those things we want to keep in place. So having, uh, professional guidelines and boundaries around that is important. However, many times those boundaries actually exclude women from growing in leadership because the higher you go in leadership, the more development needs to be done individually, uh, classrooms and, uh, books are helpful early on, but you really need personal feedback.

Kadi Cole ([28:08](#)):

Uh, individual coaching, your leaders need to mentor you. And so if we're so concerned that we can't have a man and a woman in a room together, uh, talking about leadership together or solving a problem together, um, then that what ends up happening is most women get left out of those and then they can't grow and they don't get looked at for future roles and there's fear around her being a part of it. And so John Ortberg is a big champion of this. He talks a lot about, uh, things like, uh, the screen test. If your behavior, if if we were to put your behavior up on a screen in front of the church or your family, would you be embarrassed by it? Uh, those are great heart things to check. Um, so there are a lot of suggestions like that. A lot of, um, kind of ideas.

Kadi Cole ([28:49](#)):

Uh, many people have heard of the Billy Graham rule or the, um, we talk about it now as the Mike Pence rule, that idea that we are never alone in a room, a man and a woman together. I just like to challenge. I've been the recipient of that, uh, protection. I'm grateful that I haven't had anything super inappropriate happened to me. I've had some weird embarrassing moments that make for great stories at a conference. But, uh, I appreciate those boundaries. My challenge to, especially people in ministry or people of faith who are trying to create protection around them is that a man having lunch with a man in a restaurant in the corner, uh, or going to a conference together or riding in a car alone together is not above reproach, just like if he was there with another woman or with a woman. And so we live in a different culture than 1948 when the Billy Graham rule was created.

Kadi Cole ([29:36](#)):

We have to rethink all of our boundaries. So one of my big recommendations for this is a leadership lesson most people have heard is this idea of taking someone along with you. So when you go to speak at a conference or you go to a, a big decision meeting or you have some opportunity, you take someone along with you, uh, to the hospital or the funeral and talk about what you're about to do, let them watch you in action and then debrief with them on the way home. It's a great way to mentor and develop someone in the skill sets you're trying to grow into them. My challenge is always take two people with you. Don't take just one take two, it could be two guys, it could be two girls, it could be a guy and a girl. But you do a lot of things when you, when you double your investment, first of all, you save time because now you've got two people that you're training instead of one.

Kadi Cole ([30:19](#)):

Uh, you open it up to both men and women. So for me, it's not safe for me to take just a guy or just a girl, but when I take two people, we've got coverage of the rule of three. Uh, it allows people to also make peer friendships. I think sometimes, particularly in ministry, we think of leadership development very Paul Timothy where there's like this parent child, very intimate connection that's not real. That's great for spiritual growth. That's not really great for leadership development. The number one reason people stay at a job is because they have a best friend at work. And when we only have parents at work and we don't have peer friendships, we lose out on higher morale, higher engagement, and high and lower attrition. So when you take two people with you, they get to know each other, they get a Barnabas in the trenches with them, they get time with you, they get to hear each other's questions, and you open it up for everyone to be able to access you and your development as a leader.

Doug Smith ([31:11](#)):

That is so, that's incredible. <laugh>, I mean, when I heard that, always take two. Yeah, I, which is again so simple. It's like, why didn't we think of this before? But just thank you for that. So, so good. Last thing

on creating a safe space. You said this on a podcast and I just thought it was so good for leaders to hear. You were talking about power and around this whole thing with relationships and you said when you're a leader you have power. And when you have power, you cannot have an equal relationship with someone in your organization. Um, I am a social butterfly on angiogram seven, like right on all the personalities has some very relational, but there is a reality too. The higher up you go in relationship, it's, it's, and my heart is wanting to have that equal relationship. But can you talk more about that? I thought that was so profound.

Kadi Cole ([31:53](#)):

Yeah. I think it's one of the reasons why we see the Me Too and the church two movement surprising so many men that their actions or relationships that they thought were consensual were actually not consensual. And it's because they forgot they had more power, that they have more authority. And whenever you have a discrepancy, the relationship will never be equal and it will never be consensual. One of the ways I like to think about it that's a little easier for us to, um, imagine is think of a parent and a child. There will always be a discrepancy between a parent and child because the parent always will have authority. Even if I'm 80 years old and my son will be in his fifties, <laugh>, I'm, when I say something, it's gonna have more power in his life than some other 80 year old woman in the nursing home that I live next to.

Kadi Cole ([32:37](#)):

Right? When I say I love you or I say I'm proud of you, or I say, I'm disappointed in you, it carries more because of the nature of authority and power in our relationship. Right now, he's 18, but 10 years ago when he was seven or eight, I controlled his entire life. I controlled all of it. What food he had available, what clothes he got to wear, who he spent his time with, what shows he got to watch, what school he went to. I controlled everything. Now I don't control everything anymore now that he's grad or graduated from high school and often college, but I still own a lot of his world. I'm, I'm the one who's paying for school. I'm the one who's gonna, he's gonna come home for Thanksgiving and have a bed to sleep in. And my uh, support and encouragement of him again means more than someone else than his girlfriend does, right?

Kadi Cole ([33:17](#)):

That's a peer relationship. I count more. And so as we go through our leadership, we have to remember that that matters. So, uh, I remember one time, uh, when I was executive director at our church, I was walking through the lobby and the receptionist said, Katie, what do you think of this picture? We just put it up, you know, in the lobby. And I'm like, that's great. And I moved on cause I'm late for something. Well, three or four months later, the campus pastor came to me because I oversaw the campuses and he is like, Katie, I just gotta ask like why that picture we're redecorating everything. Like, tell me the story. I wanna understand why you want this there. And I'm like, what are you talking about? I could care less about that picture. I don't even like that. You know? And he is like, because the receptionist said, you want that picture there and we have to work around that picture staying there.

Kadi Cole ([34:00](#)):

And I just thought that, you know, I just forget that when I say something off the cuff, just like with my son when I'm angry or I've had a bad day and my eight year old looks at me and I'm like, get to your room, I don't wanna hear it. Right? That means more to him that has more power over his heart than anyone else saying that. And so we have to remember our words matter. We have, it's a lot more work. I

wish this weren't the case. I wish we could just be off duty and say whatever comes out with no filter and no concern for how it might be misinterpreted. But that's the cost of leadership is that we steward all of those things. The way we look at someone, the way we say something, the way we position something, the way we vision cast something, the way we correct someone, all of those things have power and authority attached to it.

Kadi Cole ([34:42](#)):

And that intersects with our relationship. So as this relates to female leaders, we did a big survey as part of our research. We had 1200 women who were in church staff roles. And what we found is anyone who had sort of broken through that broken rung and had gone on to be higher level of leadership, all of them had someone, particularly a man, a firm leadership in them before the age of 19. Wow. So there was someone in authority that, and for most of these people, we've all grown up in kind of more male centric organizations or cultures and churches especially. So when you as a leader say to someone, I see leadership in you, I see potential in you, or say to a young person and use the word leader please, especially for women. Like I see leadership in you. I think you might have a leadership gift.

Kadi Cole ([35:33](#)):

It's gonna be exciting to see what kind of a leader you become in the kingdom. Your words carry a thousand more weight than their friend in middle school or the kid in high school, or even their coach or sometimes even their parents. And I would say most men who grow up in churches have a lot of leadership language around them. I see it all the time. Uh, guy is, you know, with his five year old and he is like, way to go, son, you're a great leader. And women in the church are looking at these young boys saying like, you're gonna lead your family. So great. One day leadership is, um, is incorporated into a young man's development from the very beginning. It is not. So with women, most women, those leadership skills having a big idea, having a loud presence, having a big voice, having uh, constructive criticism, seeing how things can be better reorganizing, those are oftentimes looked at as character flaws. They're not affirmed as leadership. And so when you have more power and you put that power to good use by affirming leadership or casting vision on someone's life, or showing them what you see in them that they can't see in themselves, man, that's the way that we use power and authority for good.

Doug Smith ([36:42](#)):

That is so good. And, and in that same vein, so you wrote Developing Female Leaders. You also, your, your newest book is called Find Your Leadership Voice in 90 Days. And I believe this was your audience that you intended it for, was for women to find their leadership voice. And I am curious, we were just talking, you know, about the Billy Graham rule about the, Hey, take two people with you. Uh, if, if there's a, a female leader listening to this and they feel like, you know, I've heard this over and over again, you know, hey, at this organization there's the the Good guys club or the old old guys club, and, and I'm a woman, so I, how can, how can women start to establish their voice if they didn't have that leader in the organization affirm them before they were 19 or even early in their leadership journey? How can they start to make their voice heard? Mm-hmm.

Kadi Cole ([37:23](#)):

<affirmative>? Yes. Well, when I, uh, wrote developing Female Leaders, I suddenly was working with a lot of churches and a lot of pastors opening up opportunities for women. And I would say the response was way better than I ever could have imagined. We have just seen incredible movement in the last three or four years around this. It's really exciting and energizing for everybody. Uh, but what started

happening is I would also meet with the women who were taking those roles, sitting at those new tables, walking through those new, new leadership doors. And as they got into those spaces, it was not as enjoyable or, um, ease. And I wouldn't say they thought it would be easy, but it was much harder and much more stressful than they thought it would be. Not because of the work, but because of the dynamics of men and women working together or being the first woman on the team, or being one of only a few women on the team.

Kadi Cole ([38:11](#)):

And one of the things we found in our research, particularly around women who serve in church ministry, most women who, um, lead at high levels in church ministry in our day and age, uh, had a professional career first somewhere else. Uh, women who stayed in the church oftentimes never develop into higher level leaders. But, uh, when we see women sort of break through that glass ceiling, or in the church world, we call it the stained glass ceiling, uh, it's usually because they had a career first. So I was a nurse and I was a dean of students at a college before I went into ministry. We see people, I have a really good friend who's a, uh, executive pastor over multi-site. She was a lawyer beforehand, uh, other people who were counselors and therapists and ran their own practice. So high capacity leaders transferred those skills into ministry.

Kadi Cole ([38:54](#)):

What ends up happening is the longer a woman serves on a church staff, the less confident she becomes in her own abilities to lead. So lemme say that again. The longer a woman serves on a church staff, the less confident she becomes in her ability to lead. She begins to question herself. She thinks she isn't really very good. She thought she was good, but she's not really very good. Uh, she's having a hard time getting people to rally around her ideas. She's having a hard time being heard. She's having a hard time influencing things in ways that she knows are right, even though she comes with expertise, she's not being, uh, listened to or valued for those expertise. So there's all these dynamics that when women sort of get into these higher leadership spaces, really weigh on her. And, uh, most women I meet start to go, I, I just am not sure this is worth it.

Kadi Cole ([39:42](#)):

I know I have something to contribute. They say they want me here, I know I can do the job, but the personal cost of trying to navigate all this, the emotional stress, the anxiety, the um, the questioning, all of those things just make me wanna quit. And so, uh, I don't want that to happen <laugh>. So I wrote Find your leadership voice in an attempt to be able to help women sort of integrate who they know themselves to be as a leader and the experiences they've had in other settings and interpret that or integrate that into a church environment. And so, um, I wrote it for small little readings every day, over 90 days to try and reset, especially from a spiritual perspective. How do I use my voice? Um, how I know that I can sometimes be too big in a room. So how do I walk into a room of men who don't like that bigness in me, but not shrink back so much that I don't have any voice and I'm just sitting in the corner like I don't have any ideas cuz I actually have a lot of ideas.

Kadi Cole ([40:38](#)):

How do I navigate those two things? Um, how do I know what my authority is? I have ideas to fix a lot of things in this church. There's a lot of things broken. Uh, how do I know when I'm a good team player? When should I not offer help? There's all these kind of rock and hard places or, or what we call double binds for women. And so I tried to really attack the biggest ones of those in that book and walk you

through over 90 days how to retrain your mindset, how to renew your mind and have some practical steps about how to find your voice, how to use it in the right ways, how you know when you've overstepped because all great leaders do. You have to correct it, come back in. What does God say about it when we do that? Um, how to we proactively make way for ourselves?

Kadi Cole ([41:19](#)):

How do we steward the authority that God has given us? And where are those lines and boundaries in the church that I'm currently serving at and the openness my leader has for me to lead? All of those things are shifters and being able to get your arms around that is not easy. So that's really what that book is about. We've had really great feedback from it. I've had a ton of guys read it by the way. And it is really just basic leadership principles I wanted to give. Uh, I wanted to do it from a female voice, my own voice, and also talk about some of the research around women. But I would say any leader who's struggled with insecurity, imposter syndrome, uh, wonders if they should, uh, fulfill their, like, continue in their calling if they aren't sure if they're in the right job or not. Anyone who's wondering or questioning about their job. This is a great book for

Doug Smith ([42:03](#)):

Yeah, and, and not just books. One of our values here at L three is, is community. We always say that no leader should ever do life alone, but in community. Uh, and what I'm hearing you say is in some organizations, women can feel alone and isolated. And so yes, they can read a book, but what else would you encourage, uh, female leaders to, to get a coach or to join a cohort or a mastermind group? Have you done anything like that in your career that's been helpful and and what advice would you give to

Kadi Cole ([42:26](#)):

Women? Yes, I say yes to all of those things. <laugh> female leaders particularly are really bad at creating a great peer network of fellow professionals. And so part of that is because our jobs are so big and there's so many extra dynamics to our work, it's exhausting. And most of us don't have a lot of easy friendships nearby. So when you're the only woman on a team and your only option are people that you oversee or are married to your peers, like those aren't easy relationships to try and talk openly and authentically about work or challenges in your leadership. So, uh, this book, and there's a video series that goes along with it made to be done in a group. So I would say get one good girlfriend or a few, uh, we have a Facebook group called Ministry Chick. We've got 3,500 female church leaders in that group.

Kadi Cole ([43:09](#)):

You can, uh, go into that and find some peers, do it online. Um, I would say coaching is a really important thing to invest in yourself. Most leadership can be taught by either a man or a woman, but there is about 15%, uh, for women that is helpful to have a female coach. When you talk about things like the sticky floor, when you talk about things like imposter syndrome, how to use your voice, how to navigate some of the dynamics, um, particularly of male populated cultures, having a woman who's been there and done that can be really helpful in those dynamics. So yes to all of those. I would just say to the women listening, um, it is hard. It is not, um, uh, it is not easy to find your peers that work and operate like you, but it is really worth it. And so joining networks, joining connections, even if you join a network with a hundred people in it and you walk away with one friend, it was worth it to join it just for that one friend. If you do that once a year for 10 years, you've got a total, you know, female posse around you that will take you through your whole career.

Doug Smith ([44:09](#)):

I love that, Katie. And, uh, this has been so rich. Oh, I want to dive into the lightning round, but before we do one, we'll include links to everything that you just mention mentioned in the show notes and your website and ways to connect with you. Is there anything else, uh, that you wanna leave leaders with when it comes to developing female leaders or finding their leadership voice before we dive in?

Kadi Cole ([44:27](#)):

I just wanna encourage all leaders sort of wherever you're at on the theological spectrum about this, that this is something we all, uh, can get better at and need to get better at. So I, I see a lot of times in places, uh, the future is female. I'm not, I don't really subscribe to that. Just like I don't think the future is all male either. I think the key for us is that John's 17 picture of unity where the future is really together. And so, uh, I wanna encourage everybody, this is something we all need to grow better at opening doors for female leaders and as female leaders walking through those doors with confidence. We can all get better at this and, and uh, really the lost world that is looking at us is looking for us to win at this. And we can do it. I know we can do it.

Doug Smith ([45:07](#)):

Come on. And thank you for playing a huge role in this, in our, in our country and I'm sure globally as well. We really appreciate it. So with the time we have left lightning round questions, just a bunch of fun questions I ask in every interview. And the first one is, what is the best advice you've ever received and who gave it to you?

Kadi Cole ([45:23](#)):

<laugh>. Uh, so I got great advice from a business coach that said always bill like a boy. Meaning always make sure my prices are equal with what the men who are doing what I'm doing. That was a hard one for me to do, but it makes a big difference. I hear that in my head all the time,

Doug Smith ([45:37](#)):

Bill, like a boy I've never heard. I love it. Uh, if you could put a quote on a billboard for everyone to read, what would it say?

Kadi Cole ([45:43](#)):

Uh, the future is together.

Doug Smith ([45:46](#)):

Uh, I'm sure you've read a lot of leadership books, obviously you offered them, authored them as well, uh, as their one or two leadership books, either recently that you've read that have impacted you or all time that you're saying like, wow, this is the book that turned everything around for me, what would they

Kadi Cole ([45:57](#)):

Be? The book I recommend the most is called Necessary Endings by Dr. Henry Cloud. Uh, just I go back to that book over and over and over again. Uh, and I do have a list of about 200 other of my favorite leadership books, but that's the one I recommend the most.

Doug Smith (46:10):

<laugh> I second, third, and fourth at. Incredible, incredible book. Uh, is there anything about your journey people have seen, you know, we didn't get a ton into your specific journey, but you've led at a high level, multiple organizations, uh, making a difference all over the country. Is there anything about your journey that you wish people knew that they may not?

Kadi Cole (46:25):

I think the thing people are most surprised about my journey is I have absolutely no vision for what God wants me to do. I just walked through open doors. He always has one for me. And so if you are a leader who's like, I don't know what God wants for me, I say, don't worry about it. He's got the plan anyway. So just do a great job with what God is open to you now and be ready for the next open door. And when it comes, just say yes and see where it leads.

Doug Smith (46:48):

That'll preach. Do you have a, a favorite failure at some point in your career that ultimately led to a success or a valuable lesson?

Kadi Cole (46:55):

Oh gosh, I have so many failures. Um, I would say, oh, choosing one, that's a tough one. I would say, um, my first 360 review when I was a young director at like 25 years old was so, uh, eye-opening for me. Cuz I thought I was crushing my job, but I was crushing people as I was crushing my job. And it, it's, I mean, still I can, I can remember where I was sitting reading it with my boss and, uh, being confronted on the way that I was just very task oriented, very focused on productivity and just walking by people and not acknowledging their presence. I mean, I probably would've thrived on like the streets of New York, right? Where you just like do this thing, but you know, I worked at a small Christian college, you shouldn't do it there. Um, and so that was probably my biggest leadership failure. I still struggle with it when I'm stressed. I still struggle with that, but it's my best lesson and it changed everything for me and how I operate in my interactions with people and the way I structure my schedule to give myself time to, uh, be a person.

Doug Smith (47:56):

So, good. You, I'm sure you get spend time with a lot of high or high impact leaders. And I'm just curious, when you get to have a dinner or coffee with someone, is there a go-to question that you always ask?

Kadi Cole (48:06):

I always love to know where people have had their favorite vacation, because I love to understand what relieves the pressure valve on leaders. Uh, and then I usually ask if you were, if, what's the book that if you knew you could write perfectly, what would it be? Uh, so like, kind of what's your biggest heartbeat that you wish the world could know from you?

Doug Smith (48:26):

So I I I usually ask whatever you ask. So I'll, I'll follow up cause my next question's very similar. Oh, <laugh> uh, I don't know if you, I dunno if you have a bucket list, uh, but if you do, I always ask people, what's something you've done in your lifetime that you think everyone should do before they die?

Kadi Cole ([48:40](#)):

I actually really think everyone should write a book in today's world where you can self-publish it. I just think the process of it and just don't overstress about it. Think of it as the first of many books and just write something down for someone to read about your life. And, uh, the experience itself is beautiful.

Doug Smith ([48:57](#)):

Did you write your own book or did you have ghost writer? How did, how

Kadi Cole ([49:00](#)):

No, I write my, I write my own books. I'm not, yeah, one book took me eight years to write. One book took me five months to write. One book took me seven days to write. So I have no system clearly or a way to do it. John Maxwell would not approve of my system <laugh>, but so far it's working for me. So, <laugh>,

Doug Smith ([49:16](#)):

Do you, uh, uh, so do you have another book in you that's that's beating in your heart right now that you know is gonna come out or

Kadi Cole ([49:23](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Doug Smith ([49:23](#)):

<affirmative>. What's that? Are we allowed to know? Is it a surprise?

Kadi Cole ([49:26](#)):

Uh, I think I'm gonna keep it a surprise. Okay. Okay. Yeah, I'm excited about it,

Doug Smith ([49:30](#)):

<laugh>. Okay. If you could go back and have coffee with yourself at any age, and even if you would've actually listened, when would you have coffee with yourself and what would've you told that version of Katie, uh, that would've made a difference?

Kadi Cole ([49:41](#)):

Oh gosh, that's a great question. I would have coffee with 25 year old Katie, because that was my favorite year. And in my mind, I am still 25. Like when I go to make a decision, I'm like single and 25 and, you know, on top of my game. And then I have to remember myself, oh no, I shouldn't do that. <laugh>, I'm not 25 anymore. Um, I would probably say, uh, like to dream bigger, I think I really, I grew up in a, in the mountains of Montana in a very blue collar family. Um, I, uh, and so there weren't, and I was a woman in a very conservative church. And so I had no, um, mindset or dream about a career. Like, I didn't have, I didn't have any ideas, I had no vision for my life. I still don't really, so part of it might be personality, but I would've said, I would've said, you being a dean of students at 25 is unusual. You winning a full ride scholarship is unusual. You getting your master's degree for free in negotiating that is unusual. There are unusual things about you, which means you will probably do unusual things. Start dreaming in the unusual instead of the normal. That's what I would've said.

Doug Smith ([50:49](#)):

Now I feel like we have to have round two and we just talked about unusual things that you've accomplished in your life and what you learned from them. It's amazing. Uh, my last question before I just leave it open-ended, is just on the other side of your life, what do you ultimately want your legacy to be and what do you wanna be remembered for? Mm.

Kadi Cole ([51:04](#)):

I I love to, uh, challenge the status quo towards obedience. So I, I feel like God has a, a desire for his people to operate. Uh, and not just his people. He has a desire for the world to operate in a certain way. And I love pushing in on places that God shows me that aren't doing that yet and helping them move that direction. And that's what I hope my legacy is. Whether it's with an individual person in a coaching or a life plan where I'm like, don't you see God as like, look at him all over here. Don't you wanna do more of this? Or if it's something as big as taking on women leaders in churches and trying to advocate for them, I, to me it's just about pushing towards that kingdom perspective and towards the obedience. He's calling us all to

Doug Smith ([51:50](#)):

Anything else you wanna leave leaders with?

Kadi Cole ([51:52](#)):

Uh, I would just say leaders, um, you know, to the guy leaders out there, I just really wanna encourage you that this is a worthwhile investment, thanks for even staying this long in the podcast, but, uh, you know, every, every female you touch, whether it's, um, the women in your family, whether it's the women in your church or the women on your staff, like your voice matters to them. And so you championing them even if it feels awkward or doesn't come out right, like, is movement in the right direction? And for women, I would just say, please don't quit. Don't give up. You know, make them fire you. If you're not sure if you're doing a good job, don't offer to quit before they do it. Like, make them come to you and tell you that you're not doing a good job. Don't assume anything. Just stay in the game until God moves you somewhere else.

Doug Smith ([52:34](#)):

Well, thank you Katie, for this conversation. Thank you for the impact you're making in the world, and hopefully we will, uh, have a round through some time.

Kadi Cole ([52:40](#)):

I would love that. Thank you for having me. Great to be here with you.

Doug Smith ([52:43](#)):

Hey Leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Katie. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find ways to connect with her and links to everything that we discussed in the show notes [l3leadership.org/346](https://l3leadership.org/346). And as always, I like to end every episode with a quote, and today I'll quote David Salers, who is gonna be coming up on the podcast. He's an executive from Chick-fil-A. He is incredible. And he said this during our interview. He said, never hire someone for their current position. Hire them for the position you need them to fill 10 years from now. I thought that was unbelievable advice. And so it's gonna be such a, a value add podcast. You'll get ready for that. It's coming next week.

And just know that, Laura and I love you. We believe in you and we say it every week. But keep leading. Don't quit. The world desperately needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.