**LWQA episode 122**

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I'm your host. Dr. Katie lender. On this episode. I'm answering a question from Kate on Instagram. And Kate says I've got a question. I'd love answered as a reasonably young academic / innovator / Agent of Change. How do you manage the more senior traditional academics who may be resistant to change and use their power or influence in the hierarchical structure of Academia to block or stall Junior academics with new ways of doing things.

Wow, Kate. This is a this is a really good question. And I know that it's something that many younger or more Junior academics struggle with and I have definitely as a more Junior administrator, especially earlier in my career dealt with this as well. And so I have some ideas for you to think about both in terms of strategy and also in terms of kind of mindset or perspective when you find yourself in these situations, so, In most cases where I have seen this happen where there is a more seasoned or traditional academic that is standing in the way of someone else creating change.

It is often rooted in fear. And noting this from the very beginning and kind of stepping back and looking at that. I find to be very useful because it is often very clear where the emotion is coming from where the concern is coming from and especially in cases where you have a more seasoned academic that kind of puts their foot down and is just not willing to budge.

I've often found it comes from this this place of fear. And oftentimes that fear is about them no longer being seen as needed. It's a fear of being. Forced to go through change that they feel is unnecessary. They may have seen Trends change over time and they feel that this is just another trendy thing that they're not willing to do.

We've definitely seen this with like the infusion of Technology into the classroom. There are a lot of Faculty who just want to wait it out and they don't want to make changes to the way that they're teaching. So here's what I recommend from kind of a mindset perspective. If you do feel like it is coming.

From that place of fear one is to Value the history of that person especially if they have been with an institution for an incredible amount of time. They will already have gone through significant change and I saw this for example at an institution. I used to work at where some departments went from maybe three people to dozens of people.

And the amount of relationships that the people had to manage the different changes in the power hierarchies the different prioritizations that happened with the curriculum the amount of students that they were dealing with, you know, all of these things were immense amounts of change for those people over time.

So having a sense of just the history of how long has this person been with the institution or how long have they been with the department and what have they already gone through in terms of some of this change that might be. Doing their perspective on how you want to move forward. The second thing is to value the person themselves.

And it's going to be incredibly challenging. It is definitely easier said than done particularly. If you have someone who is a bit of a curmudgeon or they're just rude or there's someone that you don't really like to deal with but try to Value them and come kind of look at the situation from their perspective and that is really getting back to that kind of fear based model.

If you if you look at them and you think this is really about them being afraid of what this change means for their career or for their. Agassi or for their day-to-day work. It's a little bit easier to see them as someone who is kind of vulnerable in that situation and that may be why they're acting out and using their power in particular ways.

The third area that I think is really helpful to value is the process of figuring it out and really kind of. Taking a step back and saying what can I do here to better know this situation to better understand the context and to better understand the individual who I am challenged by so that I can kind of brainstorm and think about what are the different strategies that I could use here?

What are the different angles that I could approach this problem from that might give me a different insight into how to move it forward in the way that you're looking to make the change. So those are a few different mindset kind of ideas in terms of how to approach the particular issue. But I also wanted to offer you some kind of concrete strategies that could also be useful for you.

So the first one is to start small. Rather than trying to make a large change and this applies to so many different things. I don't know quite the change you're trying to make but try to do small things to kind of Infuse in small ways the kind of change that you're talking about so that it doesn't feel so threatening and it doesn't feel so different or drastic from what that person is used to.

Another strategy, which is often challenging because it takes quite a bit of patience is just to try to wait them out and to keep bringing the issue to kind of the bring the issue to the table bring the issue to other people around them. But basically like wait and see what it is. They need to feel comfortable with it and even directly ask them.

You know, what would make them feel more comfortable with that kind of change? It's helpful. I think to try to explain your rationale. Other than asking for the change in a specific way and if they're not listening to your rationale then again going back to kind of valuing the history or the person really try to dig deep with questions about what is it about it.

That really is bothering them. And it maybe it's like one small piece of the change is actually the issue. It's not the whole thing or there may be a real reason why they're concerned about this that I think sometimes when we get a little bit stuck in our ways and we know something is the right direction to go.

We don't always listen to why people are you know raising concerns and I'll give you an example from my own work on this so. Many people in online teaching and learning feel that we no longer need to prove that online learning works that there have been enough studies that have shown the efficacy of online learning and that have shown that online learning is equivalent to face-to-face learning when it is designed appropriately.

Yet we still have lots of Faculty who questioned this and who will say, but I don't see those studies in my discipline and it bothers me. I you know, I have concerns about whether or not this is an equivalent way of educating our. Now some people look at those concerns and questions and say they just need to get over it.

You know, like they're they're wanting to kind of push those people into a more contemporary way of looking at teaching and learning but when I look at those people and I look at the studies and this is in part why we built a database of these studies in my Research Unit at Oregon State. I do see gaps in those studies and I do see that there are questions that remain unanswered and it is a better.

Strategy for me to come alongside those faculty and say you're right. We need to be asking these questions. However, it may be easier for us to ask those questions from being an online environments, you know, like it may be more helpful for those skeptical faculty to enter into online environments and conduct those studies so that they can be the ones who are really assessing the rigor of those studies and they can be producing studies that they would believe themselves.

So it's a different angle of approaching the problem and sometimes it really catches people off guard when rather than fighting with them. You say I see your point and I want to try to figure out a way that we can do this, you know, are you willing to work with me on this and it's a way to. Use the history and value of that person to surprise them a little bit.

So that's another strategy is to kind of give them what they're not expecting. An additional strategy is to try to find other allies within your department or your area and particularly if you can find people who are more traditional who are the people who've been in the department for quite some time to help you to talk with the people who are struggling a little bit to make the change that can be another helpful strategy.

One of the things that you mentioned in this question Kate was that they're using the hierarchy against you or they're using their power in the hierarchy to stop change from happening. So another strategy is to get involved in the hierarchy. Whether that's you know taking on an administrative role or joining some kind of committee where you have a little bit more power and control now, I understand some of these things can be very political and particularly for pre-tenure people.

You would want to be a little bit careful about how you are leveraging your power in those situations. But when you have the opportunity to get involved in those discussions, it can be helpful as well. But I do think that in these situations one of the most helpful things you can do is to try to shift your focus and choose another angle if what you're trying to do isn't working back up and look at the situation from afar.

Talk with some people maybe who work outside of the situation to try to get their read on it and see what they say about how you can maybe approach this from something entirely different. Now. The other thing you can also do is drop it. You can just walk away and say this is clearly not the time to do this.

These are clearly not the people who are going to allow me to do it and sometimes the dropping it in Walking Away means you take up a different. You you put your energy elsewhere. It can also mean that you decide that where you are situated is not the right culture for you and you need to look for a different job or you need to find another place where you can be kind of situated where the kinds of changes that you're looking to make will be valued.

So the latter is a little bit more drastic. I'm certainly not encouraging people to look for new jobs all the time if they're having some challenges with people within their departments, but. Those longer-term issues if they've been going on for quite some time are a sign of kind of misalignment with your values and with the larger culture and that can be a sign to think about.

Where do you think you would fit better? So Kate, I want to thank you for this question. It's definitely a complicated one and based on specific situations. I think some of the suggestions I've made would certainly work better than others and it would just depend on kind of what you're dealing with.

I welcome additional questions or follow-up to this episode by you or by others who are listening. You can always email me a contact at Katie lender dot work. You can tweet to me Acadia double underscore lender or you can connect with me. Instagram akt underscore lender to follow up with any questions or your own experiences of how you've dealt with this particular situation.

So thank you Kate for your question and thanks to everyone else for listening to this episode life word QA is part of the radical self-trust podcast Channel a collection of content dedicated to helping you seek self-knowledge nurture your superpowers playfully experiment live your core values with intention practice loving kindness towards yourself and others and settle into your life's purpose.

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