

TEASER

Wyatt Kelly: In just Western society and colonial frameworks when we think about leadership, we tend to think of it as like an individual who is this leader. Like, even, even, let's say you're Native, right? And you're like, oh, we have a chief of our tribe who is technically this leader. But the way we see it is different, because it's not just leadership it's actually service. It's actually the most highest of service you can do for the people, being a leader. And it's at the end of the day, there's a person who's a leader, but it's I think it's more collective than individual. It's about the collective of people that are around them. And it's like a person who is I don't know how you would say this, like a messenger, where every idea can kind of flow together.

INTRO

Candice Schutter: Hey y'all. Welcome back to The Deeper Pulse.

As a lead in to today's episode, I first wanna acknowledge the land upon which this podcast is created.

Cottonwood, Arizona is the ancestral homeland of the Yavapai-Apache Nation and the Sinagua, the Native people who stewarded this valley long before colonial borders or settlements existed.

In the year 1875, under the order of President Ulysses S Grant, this land's first inhabitants were forcibly removed, marched for 180 miles to the San Carlos reservation. Many died from starvation and exhaustion.

According to an article entitled, Yavapai-Apache Nation Remembers Exodus Day, *"Yavapai-Apache Elder Vincent Randall described the San Carlos reservation as a concentration camp. When the Yavapai and Apache were finally granted permission to leave in 1900 after a quarter of a century, only about 200 of them made it back to the Verde Valley. Many found... their lands had been settled by American immigrants. And by 1905, much of what remained was made public and placed under the control of the US Forest Service."*

Colonial injustice has persisted through the perpetual whitewashing of Arizona's history and the appropriation and commodification of Native land, customs, and practices. That's why The Deeper Pulse affirms Land Back movements that support Indigenous sovereignty, cultural renewal, and the return of stewardship to the people who have always belonged to this land.

So I moved to this area unexpectedly during the COVID Pandemic, and the town that I live in, Cottonwood, is sometimes referred to as "The Biggest Little Town in Arizona" which is fitting because it's really been growing in recent years. And, this is a little fun fact for you, some of the city's growth has to be credited to Maynard James Keenan, lead singer of the popular U.S. rock band, Tool. It may seem pretty far from a culture fit, but those of us who live in this area are well aware of the fact that Maynard is a avid wine lover who has invested

heavily in Cottonwood's economy, including his construction of a seven-acre hilltop "winery-slash-restaurant" that really revitalized the once sleepy heart of Old Town Cottonwood.

There's much more to that story, so Google it if you're interested. But random rock stars aside, Cottonwood's economy also benefits from its close proximity to Sedona, which is about a 20 minute drive from here.

And over the course of many, many years, gentrification has turned once sacred lands, the gorgeous Red Rocks of Sedona, into a luxury playground for spiritual tourism.

Sedona draws thousands of visitors each year, people seeking spiritual growth, healing, and connection to its vortexes. I've talked about Sedona a few times on the podcast, to more specifically the sorrid history of those so-called vortexes in episode 40 if you wanna circle back to that. There's a lot there.

And on a related note, you might also wanna revisit Episodes 65 and 66 with Aleyah-Erin Lennon, which is a two-part conversation that was created in collaboration with her Indigenous mentors, Anishinaabeg elders from the Canadian Great Lakes region.

In those two episodes, Aleyah and I deconstruct what it means to own our whiteness and the way in which we perpetuate colonial harm in spirituality and wellness spaces specifically. She and I speak plainly about cultural appropriation as well as the very real spiritual hunger that drives it.

Anyway, I'm referencing these earlier episodes of the pod because they're relevant to today's discussion. And also because it is critically important that these types of conversations aren't just a one-off. We have to keep having them.

And today's release feels timely, because here in the U.S., it's Thanksgiving week, which is a holiday that was, like it or not, shaped by political propaganda, an attempt to launder our country's history. Thanksgiving, at least the way that I learned about it as a white kid in the public school system, is really an effort to collapse centuries of genocidal violence into a sort of filtered image of harmonious feasting between colonizers and Native Americans. This is a mythology with lasting ramifications.

And I say this not to shame anyone for gathering with friends and family to express gratitude and share in the bounty of good food and great company. I get it. I'll be indulging myself. But at the same time, we can reject romanticized notions of American history, educate ourselves on the actual real-deal facts and the contemporary struggles of Indigenous communities as they continue to face the consequences of ongoing colonial dynamics.

November is Native American Heritage Month, which is a reminder to center Native voices and to actively question the stories we've been told in favor of justice, equity and truth.

Speaking of stories, and those that have been placed in service to conquest, Christianity. And here I'm not trying to dis on anyone's religion. I'm not really even speaking about individual

interpretations of a religious text. What I'm interested in is how dominant theology shapes knowledge and power. It teaches us how to think about ourselves and our relationship to the world.

Said another way, the image of God we create is the one that we emulate.

My friend Nikki G, she's been on the podcast before. She's a former evangelical Christian who gave us the what's what right before Trump was elected to his second term. Well, she recently sent me a link to an Instagram reel featuring Dr. Bernard Navarro, who is a teacher of American Indian Studies at Fresno City College, and he's also the host of The 7th Generation Podcast.

I wanna read you some of his words from the transcript of this reel because I love the way that he describes a critical difference between popular Western ideas of Christianity and Indigenous spiritual traditions. I think it's highly relevant to today's discussion about leadership.

And again, I'm quoting Dr. Navarro.

"Christianity is built around the idea that you need to be saved... you're powerless without the church, without the priest, without your savior. It's a system that creates the problem, that sells you the cure, and that's brilliant social control. Convince people they're sinful and flawed, then make obedience the way to redemption. And if you can make people afraid to go to hell, you can make them accept anything. Poverty, war, colonization. It's all part of God's plan.

But that worldview is not universal. Native people didn't believe the world was a fallen place. There was no original sin, so there's no need for salvation. There was no need for a messiah or a savior to come rescue you. The earth and the land around you was sacred, and life itself was a blessing."

He continues.

"Christianity says you are broken. Trust authority and wait for heaven. Native traditions say you're born whole. Take responsibility and care for the land. One teaches dependence on a savior or a messiah. The other teaches relationships and interconnectedness with the cosmos.

And that's why Indigenous worldviews scare colonial systems so much. Indigenous traditions don't fit into that control model. When someone asks the question, have you been saved? We think, from what? One does not need saving from a world that's already sacred. We just need to work to find the balance within this world. Something that unfortunately Christianity and Colonial systems sought to destroy."

Thank you to Dr. Navarro. Those are just a few excerpts from a much longer video that I really recommend watching from beginning to end. I'm gonna link to it in the show notes.

And I share his words to underscore how our ideas about leadership are shaped by the cultures we occupy. How we embody, yield to, and/or resist leadership is informed by the stories we know best, whether we identify with an organized religion or not.

And what we're seeing now, perhaps more than ever, is that capitalistic imperialist leadership models work really great for a dominant few, but that they are a perversion of social duty that sacrifices the vast majority of people for the sake of financial or political gain.

But leadership doesn't have to be about self-aggrandizement, profits or shareholder value. It can be something else. It can be a shared embodiment of care and curiosity, a dogged commitment to meaningful results, sometimes results that we might not even get to see in our short lifetimes, but results worth reaching for nonetheless.

Today, my guest is Wyatt Kelly. Wyatt and I are both graduate students at Arizona State University pursuing a Master's of Science in Organizational Leadership. It's an online program, and I've made some extra effort to get to know Wyatt, not only because I'm drawn to the way that his mind works, but because of the unbridled hope that he embodies and *actualizes* in the work that he does every single day.

Blending the forward-thinking optimism of youth with the synergistic potency of collectivism and relational guidance. It's an approach that I think, right now especially, we could all benefit from learning more about.

Wyatt Kelly is a young Apache man, a dedicated advocate, creative, and organizer, deeply rooted in community health and wellbeing. He currently works for the California Consortium for Urban Indian Health. His efforts span across urban and rural Indian country with a focus on equity, healing, and Indigenous self-determination. Whether leading statewide public health initiatives, advising on policy, or contributing to research, Wyatt weaves together traditional knowledge and modern innovation to uplift Native communities. He currently serves as a statewide manager, trusted advisor to the state of California, and collaborator on numerous Native-led projects and initiatives.

Guided by the principle of acting for the next seven generations, Wyatt is committed to transforming systems, centering Native voices, and helping build a future rooted in sovereignty, strength, and community wellbeing.

Here's my conversation with Wyatt Kelly.

INTERVIEW BEGINS

Wyatt Kelly: Oh wow. I'm losing my mind, 'cause I have, uh, hummingbirds, that's like one of my favorite animals. And I'll always get hummingbirds that fly by and whenever I see 'em, like, they always stop right near me.

Candice Schutter : Love it.

Wyatt Kelly: How are you? How's your day?

Candice Schutter : I'm all right. How are you?

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. I mean, I'm outside enjoying some great weather, which is nice. It was raining out here in, uh, Sacramento, California, but the sun is finally shining, so that's nice.

I always try and take a lot of my meetings actually outside if I can just, 'cause it's been raining so everything's really like blooming. So it's just nice to feel like, oh yeah, you know, I'm out in, in the world too, instead of just being behind a screen.

Candice Schutter : Beautiful. Yes. And we know about being behind a screen, don't we? Whew.

Wyatt Kelly: Exactly. Yeah.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

Well, I'm super grateful that you made the time. It means a lot, Wyatt. I know you've got a lot going on.

Wyatt Kelly: I mean, I think it's perfect too 'cause we're in Native American heritage month, so it's a great, uh, great time.

Candice Schutter : How is that celebrated in your community?

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah, well, I'm, so, I'm here in the capital of California, so Sacramento, California. And we typically have a celebration, a parade that happens. So we spend about a week like developing a float with a lot of youth. And there's like hundreds of floats from all over, from all the tribes. And we all march around the capitol and downtown, really just bringing awareness to the fact that we're all still here.

In one of the tribes out here, uh, Wilton Rancheria, they were able to actually get like a statue removed from the capitol and put a new, like Native statue up. And that happened two years ago. And that's near the capital steps here. So we, we go there to just celebrate the, the small victories and the fact that, you know, here we are today.

A lot of gathering, a lot of folks come together. There's a lot of things going on, a lot of different galas. I'm actually gonna go to a gala next Thursday for Native American Health Center of San Francisco is having a gala, and they always host it during a Native American Heritage month and bring out a ton of dancers and traditional singers and, and we just try and be together and like celebrate a, celebrate life.

Candice Schutter : Love it.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : So did you grow up in Sacramento?

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. So yeah, I mean, I, I grew up here. My grandma moved here in like the middle of her life. So I, I spent a majority of my life here. And then I went to go to LA. And went to school out there working with the tribes in Los Angeles more, doing a lot of work on the reservations out there. And then I, my work brought me back to Sacramento. Because I started getting into more statewide work and policy work.

So I left Sacramento for like six years. And then I've been back now for like, five years. And yeah, so I've spent most of my time in Sacramento. Yeah, I would say.

Candice Schutter : Tell us a little bit about your childhood and what it was like for you.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. So I had a pretty, I would say a pretty, uh, normal childhood, a pretty good childhood. I grew up with an older brother who's 10 years older than me, which was a really great thing, because he was like a big inspiration, someone I looked up to, um, really to, to help me on my own path. I really got into skateboarding at a young age, 'cause he was really into like rock and skateboarding. So I just had like a little crew of skaters. And I was used to be sponsored actually. So I was skateboarding sponsored for a couple years. And then, uh, I didn't wanna go to college.

I, I think growing up, like just even as a Native person, um, I dunno, there's a lot of traumas in that, you know, a lot of people in my family aren't really doing the best. And there's a lot of weight that you, that every person I feel like carries when it's, it feels like it's hard to break outta the box. Or hard to like, move on to that next step in life. And my brother was actually the first one to go to college. So when he left to college and I was still like, growing up in high school, I was like, man, like that's something that maybe I could do. Because he went on to go and like, study aerospace engineering and was really into math and was really like, you know, doing his thing.

But at the same time there was still traumas within that. I think a lot of it's, I, I don't wanna like be stereotypical of my own people, but there is a lot of Native people who like, just drink a lot. Alcohol is a big issue along with drug use. And my brother really struggled with, with drinking a lot growing up too.

So I had like a sort of like intertwined trauma of oh, I can do great things. But there's also like all this other weight that, that things happen.

And, I don't know. Yeah, it was just, it was interesting seeing that. But then when he moved away to school, he ended up moving away out of the state. And I kind of started going in my own path. And I just, I don't know, I was just kind of in a, in a phase of life where I was like, I really don't, I, I started being a sushi chef. I started working at this Japanese restaurant. And it was really great and I fell in love with the people there. And just, it was like the first time I

felt in my life that I had like, met a group of people that I felt really connected to in that way. So I didn't wanna leave there.

And I remember, I was working there for a couple years and I didn't wanna go to college. And, and my, my brother was already doing his thing. And my mom had given me an ultimatum and was like, you're either gonna go to school or you have to leave this house. You have so much more potential to do things for the community, for you, for the family.

So then I was like, yeah, that's, that's true.

So then I ended up going to college. And I got a scholarship from San Manuel tribe out in the Riverside area. And I went down there and, and went to UCR and I studied Native Studies and English. I think that's when I really started to get back into like community spaces when I was working with the tribe. And the reason I wanted to go there too, is I remember touring it with my mom, um. Because I got into a few schools, and I remember touring it with my mom and there was like a huge Native student body. Probably 30 Native kids. And they had their own booth. And like I went up to them and like, oh yeah, you know, my family's from here and here. And they're like, oh, that's so awesome. We have like the best Native student body. And we do all these things together. And we'll go to the boarding school and do like hand games and songs. And we'll work with the youth. And then I was like, wow, that's, that's super amazing. And then I ended up, yeah, reaching out to the tribe. And they ended up giving me a scholarship.

So that like, really solidified it for me was like, lemme, I gotta go here and like, get back to this work of like, community work. And I think, uh, it's important because I feel like growing up, like a lot of Native youth, there's not a lot of Native youth who wanna walk this path, you know. Like there's a lot of Native youth who come from communities and, and they see the traumas in communities and they see, you know, it's different for everyone, right?

Some people grow up on the reservation. And some reservations are a lot better than others. You know, there's casino tribes where people are getting like per cap and they're getting money every month. And there's tribes that don't get anything and they're living in, uh, like beat up homes and like beat up trailers. And, you know, growing up in those environments, you know, it can really shape you a lot at a young age. And I feel like there's a lot of youth who grow up and they wanna just kind of get away from it all. And are just like, I just wanna not be involved in community. And I just wanna like, maybe I'll go study something and then I'll go work doing marketing. Or I'll go and, and then just, and then they just don't look back.

And that was kind of me for a moment like growing up knowing like I was Native and growing up with my grandma and her sharing stories. But then me also being like, I don't know why I wanna be involved in this if like, this is what it is. It's like seeing my uncles on dialysis 'cause they're drinking too much. Or people fighting because they're on drugs. It was just like, why do I want to be involved in that?

But then it, and then, but then something changed, you know, when I started going to school and it was like, you know what, I can actually like, have a say in this. And like create change for the next generation after me. So I think that that's kind of where it led me.

And then after college, I, I met a really great leader, a mentor. Her name's Virginia Hedrick. She's one of the most amazing women out there in, in Indian country doing amazing work. And we, I was working with the tribe. And we were on a zoom meeting because they had just launched this Native specific like call, text, and chat line, where like any Native person could call and get connected to like a Native navigator. Like they're not necessarily a licensed therapist. But, but some of them are licensed therapists and most of them are really like community centered folks who know how to talk with community. And they understand traumas. And they understand different realities of being a Native person. So the tribe I was working with and my previous mentor, who's a really great woman as well, Juliette McMullen. She was like, yeah, I really want to collaborate with Virginia and like learn about this line. So we get on a Zoom call. And then me and Virginia just kicked it off and she was like, oh, I gotta schedule a meeting with you another time. So then we scheduled our separate one-on-one meeting and she's like, you should just come work here. You should come work for me. Like, we could do all this statewide work and really impact community even more. And I was just all for that. So I came up here and since then she's been like, uh, one of the best mentors of my life and just someone to look up to in terms of like leadership. You know, she's a young, I don't know, I, I don't, I don't wanna age her 'cause I don't know how old she is exactly, but she's young. And she has like six kids. And she's married and she sits on like 10 boards. And she's running a statewide consortium. And she's just doing it all. And man, to be able to, to see how like fierce she is in government rooms and policy rooms. And how she leads her team and the type of leadership, it's an inspiration.

So I think that's been like kind of where I got to where I am today. And it's like skateboarding, street culture, a disconnect from a sense of my own culture. And then like, full circle moments, bringing it back to where I am now. Which is, uh, is crazy. 'Cause I feel like now I try and do all that in one. I'm trying to like, find the intersects of like just pop culture and hip hop culture and like, you know, broader sense of culture. And then tying it back to like Native youth that I get to work with. And like, how can we find avenues to walk the line on all of these things?

And make, make like working in Indian health and working for communities seem more like fun. Like it's a, it's a heavy job and it's a lot of, a lot of things that, that go into it. But it's a beautiful thing to be able to give back to community. And be able to like, help change the needle just a little bit, you know?

Candice Schutter : Absolutely. Well, it's interesting 'cause when I was looking, I mean we connected through our program at ASU. But then of course I went in into the interwebs and started poking around like, what else has Wyatt been doing? And you have a print company speaking of that intersection.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : Tell us about that.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. I started that. I've always been like a, always trying to do like just different artsy things. Or I don't wanna say like, oh, I'm an entrepreneur or something. But I'll just have creative ideas or see like, gaps in things. And I'm like, how can I fill this gap? And I

realized like a lot of these organizations that I was working with, we were all like, oh, we gotta print materials for this event we're having. Or we're having this parade and we need to do, like, you know, make these shirts. And then we're spending tons of money to like a huge corporation, you know, Vistaprint or, or whatever to print these shirts. And it's like, it's great and all. But like, we're just throwing all this money, and like, none of it is going back into the community, you know.

So I was like, how can I? And I had a friend, or I have a friend who runs like a clothing brand here. And he has all these printers. And he has like, you know, big, huge like poster printers and t-shirt printers and scanners.

And he's like, yeah, dude, like you can use the, use the stuff as long as you buy like your own ink or whatever. And I'm just like, all right, cool. So I just started up a Native print company just so I can work with Native organizations. And then, through that, giving the money back, you know. Like I, I don't really make any profit from that at all. If there is profits, I just put 'em right back into like doing a youth sponsorship or a scholarship. Or just trying to give back to people who need it, you know. There's a lot of people in our community who need like emergency assistance, who are maybe in abusive relationship and they need a hotel for a night or whatever it may be. And it's just like, how can I have a stream of money that I can offer back to the people?

So, yeah, I started that and that's been, it's been pretty fun. I've done a few projects. I, I worked with Sacred Path, which is like an Indigenous wellness center down in Southern California, and I made like all their team shirts. They were like, oh yeah, we want sage green and we want the print here. So I like went bulk buying Adidas stuff. Like just trying to find avenues to where I can cut costs a little bit, that way I can like really bring more revenue back to community.

So I was doing that and it, it's been great. It's just I am, uh, it's really like a time consuming thing, you know? So like when I started my program at ASU, I had a, someone come to me from the Smithsonian, a Native organization who was gonna work with the Smithsonian. And they were like, we want to do these really big prints and posters. And it was a job I actually had to turn down just because I didn't have the, the capacity with school. And then I sit on, you know, board of directors for, for another Native company. And then my own job, like also was demanding. So it was like. It's a great thing to do, if I have free time, but it's also been hard with the capacity of, of where I'm at, you know?

Um, but yeah, I think it's a really great thing. And something that I'm hoping in the future, if I can get a lot of clients, and really develop a big pocket of money, I can offer like a big scholarship to some students. Or even offer like a creative mentorship program where I can take youth on like trips. And like we can do like a retreat and really bring in some speakers and learn how to, you know, be a leader in community and use your sort of creative visions to, to build stuff.

You know, I think it's all about like building things and like building up the next generation of people to, to keep the work moving forward.

Candice Schutter : Yeah, and it's one of the things that I was so struck by, I don't even remember what the course was, but the first course we took together.

Because I remember scrolling through the discussions. And then I started reading yours and I was like. Who's this guy? Like I just love the way your mind works and your observations. And one of the things that really stood out to me, and this was before I realized that you were Native, was just that focus on the communal, that focus on giving back and that cyclical nature of leadership. And it really stands out in a contemporary program.

And that's one of the things I wanna talk to you about is like you chose to do a leadership program. And you're almost done. Congratulations by the way you're about to graduate.

What's that experience been like for you bringing your, your cultural perspective and now that you're wrapping things up. Anything you wanna share with us about that?

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah, I mean, I feel like I've always been a, I mean, even my parents always tell me, you know, when I was doing sushi. It was like, man, like you're just too smart to like not continue your education to keep learning. And when I went back to school and I went to college, and I was really getting into sort of like discourse around like sovereignty. And what it, even like, what it even means to be like a Native in academia and like what a privilege that is for our people to have professors who are Native.

And when I went to UCR, like another, you know, big thing there was the amount of Native professors they had was amazing. So I was introduced to some, some amazing mentors and amazing professors who are Native from throughout the nation who were also mentors to me as I was going through my program.

And really, like, I was, I was like a nerd honestly. Like I didn't do anything in college. I never partied. I was literally like that kid who was always raising their hand in class to bring on some more discourse around what we're talking about. And then like going to office hours afterwards. And I had a professor, Mark Minch, who, he's a great guy, Dr. Mark Minch. He was like, you should come and do archival research for me, for my book I'm writing on the ghost dance in California. And like we can go through libraries and just like spend hours digging through texts to like really uncover history about our people. And I was all for it. Like I was in, I think every professor's office hours, I'm pretty sure, every professor I had could probably attest to that of like how much of a bug I was of like knocking on their doors. What else can I read? Like what else can I do?

And then when I started doing the work up here and doing policy work and really developing, this is like when COVID hit. So I graduated in 2020 with my undergrad. And then I immediately got onto big projects with the state of designing COVID work and like what that meant. And I, I was so lucky to have my boss, Virginia, who was really adamant about letting me take like my creative visions and running with them. And I mean, we were getting all this money from the state, from the California Department of Public Health.

And she was like, what do we do? Like, what should we do? And we're like, we can do Facebook Lives. So we started doing Facebook Lives every week to go through the data and

update where we're at in tribal country, Indian country in general. And then I was like, man, you know, the youth are like so at home, you know, like I feel like there's a big disconnect right now. And everyone's just on social media and there's all this fear around what the world's gonna look like. So we ended up, like. I was like, let's do like a billboard series and launch, like an art contest. So we ended up launching a statewide art contest where Native youth submitted their art around what COVID, how it was making them feel, or what they wished to, like, what, what life would look like after COVID. Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. And just, and just sharing with that and like a narrative of like how they're feeling and like what it's been like for them. And we ended up selecting 10 winners of that art contest. And I, I worked with them. And we took their art and turned it into public messaging billboards, like up and down the state of California. And I think we had like 40 billboards up and down the state that were just art by Native kids that was like reflecting public health messaging that CDPH was like, oh yeah. Like get your, you know, whatever it is, get your vaccine. Or find ways to, to come together with family. Or if you're struggl like, you know, just common messaging, but like, put on top of some beautiful graphics that Native youth made.

Candice Schutter : Hmm.

Wyatt Kelly: And that was a beautiful thing because, one of the Native youth who did the billboard, they're from Oklahoma, from a tribe out in Oklahoma. I think it's, they were, they were Chickasaw. And their tribe actually saw it on the news. And they were like, wow. Like, that's amazing. And it was, this is like an, an 8-year-old. And they actually flew her and her family back out to their homelands to talk about what that was like, to be an 8-year-old working on a billboard and being involved in trying to make things better for your community in such a hectic time.

Um, so I'm, I'm all here caught up in all this work. And I'm, you know, creatively flowing and like watching all these great things happen. And then, my CEO was like, man, you should really think about going back to school after COVID and, you know, once this work kind of slows out a little bit. And like maybe you can like think about doing that and I'd be happy to support you in whatever that looks like. Like if you need an extra day off, per week or whatever it is.

And then, I met another one of our health clinics. He's a CEO of a health clinic out in Bakersfield. And he actually got his master's in organizational leadership. And he was like, yeah, like I really recommend you doing that 'cause it's gonna really teach you how to move on to that next step too in your own leadership.

And I was just like, yeah, I gotta do it. It took me some years to finally say like, let me apply and do it. But I'm really happy I did. Because I feel like it brought me back into a head space of thinking in a growth mindset too for myself. 'Cause it's a lot different when you're in an academic setting and you're getting materials to read and you're getting to examine different perspectives too. I'm in circles where I'm with the same folks, and obviously I'm involved in like policy work too. So I'm obviously getting to hear a ton of different perspectives in the policy realm. But the academic setting is different. And I think it really has shaped how I view leadership and how I'm growing in my own work.

Candice Schutter : I'm wondering, because you have this applied experience in an organization and a lot of academic learning can be a little theoretical.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : So you have this applied experience, but then you also have a Native perspective on leadership, which is different than, let's face it, the folks who created the academic institution and sort

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. Yeah, yeah,

Candice Schutter : of the more colonial perspectives that shaped the university experience.

So I'm ask it in this way, but you can answer the question any way you like. But like, if you were to insert into the curriculum, our curriculum, a course or a focus that's missing based on the perspective that you bring, like what would that entail? What would that look like? Or is there anything missing?

I mean, I'm, I'm assuming.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : I'm making an assumption here. So what are your thoughts?

Wyatt Kelly: No, I mean, I think the one thing that I always, you know, when in just Western society and Colonial frameworks when we think about leadership, we tend to think of it as like an individual or like a person who is this leader. And like even, even, let's say you're Native, right? And you're like, oh, we have a chief of our tribe who is technically this, this leader.

But the way we see it is, is different. Because it's not just leadership for money or to be a CEO or to do this or that. But it's, it's actually service. Like, it's actually the most highest of, of service you can do for the people, being a leader. And it's, and it's at the end of the day, there's a person who's a leader, but it's, I think it's more collective than individual.

You know, like I think there should be something that talks about leadership isn't just about a single person who's really like a leader. It's about the collective of people that are around them and what they're doing to like. It's like a person who is I don't know how you would say this, like a messenger where everyone goes through this one thing and it all comes together to be like, said in a certain way. Or every idea can kind of flow together.

So I think that's something I always think about through this whole academic journey, I've been thinking about leadership as like a collective force and not necessarily. Like, I'm not the one leader, you know, my leadership comes from a million other people and a million other ideas and a million other avenues that that flow to me from whoever I meet, you know?

And I think also like leaders are, I guess where my work is so different 'cause it's all about public health and like for community. But I know typically like in companies like, you know, like Google or Facebook, it's kind of just like given to people through like you know, I don't know. I feel like it's a lot of networking at that point. And like, I think leadership needs to be more based on like actions and, and equity too.

Like I feel like there's not that many great leaders out there that are really leading with equity in mind and thinking about community at all. Like I feel like it's more so, this is a business and like we're just gonna be a business.

And we see the same thing though in, in Indian country as well. I don't think it's, um, it's just like siloed off into the western world. Like it definitely bleeds into, into there's organizations in Indian country that follow the same models. And there, and the leadership is not good. And, and I think people always say like, people don't leave a bad job, they leave a bad leader.

'Cause I know for me, like even working under my, my mentor now and my current boss, like no one leaves. Everyone is there to like stand by her side and, and whatever, because she's just such a great leader and someone who understands that communal aspect of leadership. Like our, our voices are never not heard. It never feels like she's the one who's like in charge above and making every decision. It feels like we're all making the decision as one.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

Well, it's interesting because it's, profit driven companies make an attempt to to do a lot of those things, but there's like an, I mean, I think that there's an inherent conflict between serving people and profit margins.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : You know, it's like we can rewrite mission statements and come up with company values and do all of these things, but it is largely performative if we're not willing to make certain concessions in order to maintain that integrity.

But at the same time, I think it is about character to a certain degree. Like if I think about your mentor, I have a sense, based on what you've shared and how long you've worked with her, for example. If we took her and plopped her into a profit driven company, her character would still be intact and she would, would still lead in the way that she leads in that more communal way.

And I just wondered, like, it sounds like you didn't grow up on a reservation, like you went to.

Wyatt Kelly: Urban. I was an urban Native for sure. Yeah.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. Urban kid going to public schools. Do you feel a difference in terms, not just in terms of being within your community of people that you can better relate

to, that understand your trauma and your experiences. But do you feel like the leadership is different because of those core values and the tribal traditions? Or, or what are your thoughts on that?

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I've, I've worked with a ton of different people in my path. And working in Indian Health, I've met a ton of different people. And I can say it's like a, it's like a 50/50 still. I feel like there's a handful of great leaders out there that really hold on to their truths and where they come from. And they don't let this, you know, money machine control them. But there's also people who work for big tribes and they're playing the game. And they, and they want that money and they don't care if it means that some of their people in their communities are struggling. They're gonna keep running in that business mindset.

So I think it's like a 50/50 thing. But I think I've been so blessed to, to have leaders who have guided me, I wanna say more on like the righteous path of it all. Of like, we have to stay true to our community.

And one of my mentors was telling me about how in their eyes, like leadership is like storytelling. It's to teach and to guide and to correct the wrongdoings and to like, remind folks as well in your leadership of why it's so important. And when I think about storytelling and, and in the importance of, in our communities, you know, that's how we shared histories. You know, and it's something that we all get as Native folks.

I think it's also universal, you know, like people can talk to their grandma and hear stories of their childhood growing up. And you're carrying that intergenerational knowledge from understanding these stories and those lessons. And I think leadership in a sense is kind of like storytelling. And it's, it's a responsibility that we all have as leaders to kind of envision it as storytelling. And how do we tell this story in, in the right way to sort of shape the next generation to be?

I mean, I think when I think about it in, in my sense too, it's like I just want the next generation to be better than me. And like have better tools. Because maybe I didn't have all those tools along the way, but I can share those secrets I've learned along the way in my own struggles, and struggles that I still have today. And I'm hoping that, like, by doing that, there'll be a younger version of, of me who will see it and. Oh, okay. Like, let me pick, pick it up.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

I'm glad you brought up the generational thing, because I think that's another area in which we can really learn from Indigenous leadership and real respect for those generational contributions.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : So, you're an elder to those, those kids that you're guiding, right. But then you have elders that are guiding you. And, that's synergistic, that goes both ways, right? Because we're learning from the next generation at the same time.

What are your thoughts on that?

Wyatt Kelly: For sure. Yeah, a hundred percent.

That's like a new thing. I, I'm starting to like put this word on myself now, and it's like getting around. But I call myself a Yelder, so like a youth elder. Um, and it's great. I'm like, I'll go into rooms and sometimes I'm in the room. And they're like, this young man, this youth right here.

And then I'll go into rooms with like kids and they'll be like, oh, you're like Uncs, bro. Like you're uncle bro. Like, you're like.

And I'm just, it's just like a interesting, like right in the middle of, I'm right on that line of like, I'm still a youth, but I'm still like on my way to being an elder.

So, uh.

Candice Schutter : Right.

Wyatt Kelly: So I'm kind of this Yelder person.

And it was funny 'cause I was actually speaking at a Indian Health Service conference last week in San Diego. And I had said that on stage, and I'm like, yeah, I can consider myself a yelder. Because when they, when they, when we brought on the panel, they were like, oh yeah, we're gonna have Wyatt, and then we're gonna have like two youths. And the youths are just like a few years younger than me. And they're like, p they're calling you like, they're like basically putting you in a box, like, like you're an old person now. And like, we're the youth here. And I'm like, what? This is crazy.

So I had to like I'm letting them know, like, hey, like I'm still kind of a youth, so like, don't, don't, uh, don't age me too quick now. Um.

But yeah, it's definitely a, it's definitely a interchanging thing because I feel like I'm constantly like, they're giving me all this slang like. They were saying something about my outfit and they were like, oh yeah, man, like you, you stay trim. And I'm like, what the does that even mean staying trim?

So like, I'm getting all this like, new lingo from the, from the youth today. And then like, I think the one thing about it too is like really building that trust relationship for them to know I want to help them in the best ways possible. And then they can joke around with me and, and

be themselves and not have to feel like, oh, Wyatt's this like older person that I can't relate to, you know?

It's more so like I can share like my ideas and share like what I think about the world. 'Cause like he's just gonna listen and like help me out. And, and sometimes it's just listening. Like sometimes I feel like when I work with the youth, I try and just listen and take it in. And maybe I don't have the words to say right on the spot. Or like, maybe if it has to come down to advice of like what I think about it, like I try and just like give myself time to like think about where the youth are today in today's world.

Because it's so different growing up, right? Like from, even when I was growing up. Like I remember when, when the first iPhone came out and like, now it's like there's kids who are growing up with an iPhone at five years old. And they're like reading stuff and learning stuff. It's like just a different world that I don't ever like to think that I know a lot of things. Like, I'd like to think that everything, like I can always learn from every single person I meet no matter who it is.

It's, so I think there is that exchange of like, I'm able to share my, my struggles and maybe things that I had to work through. And then I can hear like what youth are struggling with today or what they're creatively thinking about. And I'm trying to find like the bridges of that. Of oh, if you have this idea for this, like what tools do I know that I can help? Or like, who do I know even in my network that I can connect you with to help you build something. So it's, there's a, I feel like there's a lot of exchange.

And I feel like there's a lot of leaders out there who are gatekeepers and who like, don't wanna do that. And I, it's, it's been a conversation I've had with my mentors and, and different CEOs in these Indian health spaces. And one thing I always try and bring up. And it's, it's interesting, because there's a lot of people, like, especially in Native communities, where we're like, yeah, you know, we need to uplift our youth. And we need to focus on building a better future for the next seven generations. And we want to support and uplift our youth. But then we're not giving our youth leadership positions. Like we're not letting them lead.

So it's like, how can we say this when we're not actually listening to the youth who know what's next for them? So I think I'm a big advocate for like, bringing more youth into leadership at a younger age and giving them like the tools and helping them out.

Like mentoring. That's why mentorship is so huge, right? It's like.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Wyatt Kelly: Maybe I don't have all the tools to be the best CEO, I could be right now. But like, if I have a group of mentors around me who have been doing that work, like I can learn that so much faster than taking the next 10 years of my life, jumping around and learning it on my own.

So if I meet kids and they're like, I have this idea and I wanna design a sneaker. I wa like, I met this kid. I was at a conference, and I was tabling for my organization. And I met a kid who was 13. And I told him like, oh yeah, I, I do this, but I also have like this printing company. And like, I like to do art and like, I'll do this.

And he's like, dude, I love drawing. I really want to get into like animation. He's in the tribal like TANF program. So he's just going around with a ton of other Native kids and going to these conferences to learn. And he like stuck with me the whole time at the conference. He was sitting at my table and would not leave, 'cause he just felt so connected. I'm like, dude, you gotta go watch the presentations. He's just like, I just wanna like show you what I'm thinking. Like I'm just wanna draw this. And he, he had actually drawn, it's my, it's crazy. It's like my wallpaper right now.

This uh, this sketch.

Candice Schutter : Oh, I love that. Oh, that's great.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. He is like 10 years old. And he draws this and I'm like, dude, I need to get this printed on, scan it in and get it on T-shirts. And let's put it on a skateboard and shoe designs. And I'm just trying to give him the tools of like, oh yeah, I can print this for you. Let me get in touch with your family. And like I'll even, you know, put up the money to get some, some stickers printed. And you can give them out to your friends. Just to like, start that sort of like, things are possible. And like I could do that if, like, have the people around me to help me out.

So that was like a huge thing for me to support that.

And sorry, my cat wants to go inside, so I gotta let her in.

Candice Schutter : By all means, the cat is in charge.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah, I know. It's crazy. She's like my boss. Um,

Candice Schutter : Speaking of leadership.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah, that's a different type of leadership right there, seriously.

Candice Schutter : That's for sure.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : As I listen to you describing all these different facets of how you do leadership, how you conceive of it, how you've experienced it, how just relational it is. Humility is really coming through. And also this sense of giving rather than taking.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. Yes.

Candice Schutter : There's a generosity and a humility to it. And this, this kid is drawn to you, 'cause you're really seeing him. You're present. You're willing to help facilitate the experience that he wants to have. That's, I think, a piece of leadership that gets a little lost in a lot of places. Rather than thinking about like, what the organization wants to achieve and that there's another way of going at it that I hear you describing.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. Uh, yeah, I think it's beautiful.

And that's what, and that's just tying that back into like bringing more youth into leadership is like, I truly think that the youth do have like the answers in a, in a way. Like maybe they don't know how to formulate this answer that they have yet, but like, they have the answer. Like they know it.

So I, half the time, I, I really just believe in the youth. And I believe they know what is best for, for their generation. And I just try and guide through my own, you know, my own, uh, struggles in life too. You know, I'm not a perfect person. You know, I've struggled with, with addiction. I've struggled with depression and like just drinking too much, and like going through my own ups and downs in life. And I try and just share that. So the youth feel like they're not alone. So I feel like there's a lot of.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Wyatt Kelly: I don't know. There's so much like stigma around just like not being okay. And it's okay to, to not be okay. And like every, like, even healers, like people in the world who are healers. Like healers need healing too. There needs to be no stigma around going through traumas. Or, you know, maybe you, you become addicted to something or you, you fall into addiction for a minute. But there's, there's ways to get out and we have to like uplift that and not push people down because, oh, you did that. Or, oh, you know, you were drinking too much and that you've kind of fell in a hole. We need to help pull people out and like show them light, rather than just being like, oh, like this person's kind of fell off. You know, because we, we all go through things in life. And, and life isn't easy.

And it's so easy. Especially I feel like in today's world, uh, and I try and talk to, to a lot of youth about this too, is like with, in today's world with technology and like social media and how quick it is to be like cyber bullied and to be.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Wyatt Kelly: Having your name bashed on the internet. Or people posting videos of you on the internet.

And I was talking with an elder. I was at USC after I went to that conference that I was speaking at. There was another, this board that I sit on, they were having an event at USC. And, and the two directors were brought out to sort of talk around, they do a lot of like Native

youth work with boys, called Boys with Braids. Really uplifting young Native men and letting 'em know it's okay to have long hair. And it's okay to have these different cultural perspectives.

And, you know, people are gonna make fun of you. I mean, that was something that was big for me. I grew up having long hair too. And I remember I would go, I went surfing one time with my dad. I mean, it, it's crazy because it like sticks with you forever, right? I can think about this and remember this moment when I was like 10. And I was in the water and this boy was like making fun of me. And was like, oh, I can't even tell if you're a girl or a boy. And like. And this is like, this stays with me till, till now. I'm like, I remember this.

And I had a teacher too, like in fourth grade, who was just a horrible person. But he would just belittle me for having long hair. And I, I grew up pretty, uh, like my, my parents didn't really go to school or anything, so I grew up pretty poor actually. And I had to wear sort of like the same jacket to school every, it was, I only had one jacket. I only had one jacket, and I had one pair of pants. And, and that's what, you know, that's what my, my mom could afford at the time. And people would make fun of me, and even my own teacher would make fun of me.

So there was like a point in fourth grade where I, I was going through such a mental battle that I was like making myself throw up so I could get picked up from school. And it took, it took like months. I had to end up going to the hospital and getting scans on my stomach, because I was too scared to like, open up to people around me to say like, Hey, this is happening to me. You know?

And I feel like there's a lot of youth that, that are suffering in silence. And I think there needs to be less stigma around suffering and really opening the conversation to say that a lot of people struggle in a lot of different ways throughout life. And we can't just bash people. All we can do is, is help them learn and help them grow from experiences, you know?

And I try and always share that with like, the youth is like, man. 'Cause you know, it's just so this is a different time. And now it's like, man, there's kids on social media at 10 years old.

And like, there's a young man who, who's being really like, attacked cyber bullying wise. And like, people had taken a video of him going to the bathroom. And then they're like using AI to edit it and making into this like, really nasty video and trying to spread it all online.

I'm just like, dude, this is getting. It's crazy. It's getting

Candice Schutter : Brutal.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah, it's getting brutal out there. And we lose too many kids to, to suicide and lose too many kids to suffering in silence. We need to open that conversation up and say it's okay. Like, and don't let this online shit just affect you like that.

I think the youth, we need to build stronger youth mentally too. Because it's gonna get crazier and crazier as this AI gets crazy. And, you know, people are hacking people and posting your messages and your snap chats or whatever people are doing. And it's like, we gotta stay strong and realize, like this internet stuff is just, it's just all noise on the internet.

Candice Schutter : And building the community connections too. You know, really creating spaces where, you know, a kid can hover near you at the table where there's a bunch of people who he can relate to a bit more. And, and eventually open up.

Because I mean, it's unrealistic for us to expect the youth to open up without the trust, without building the trust, without the relationships, right. That's a key piece.

And one of the things that I really have learned from you, Wyatt, is. We worked on a group project together and we focused on your organization. We created a diversity training, and it was focused on culturally-centered care in the health communities that you service.

And I think this is kind of an important component of what we're talking about when we're talking about youth that are struggling, for example. It's easy for us to think of like a one size fits all approach to mental health or to treatment or to what have you. And what working with you really kind of helped me to understand and give language around we need to look at it in a more holistic way, to really consider the context within which that youth lives or resides, what they resonate with.

Can you talk a little bit about that and why that's so important?

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah, a hundred percent.

I think I, I think, and I think culturally-centered care is like applicable to, to not just like Native communities, but to, to every community really. It's starting to actually grow a bit more, because I saw a commercial the other day for some hospital and the doctor was talking with a patient and they were asking about their family and they were asking about their family history. And then it was like, this is what, like family care should look like.

And I was like, this is like culturally-centered care starting to happen, like here we go. Because it's about understanding your family, understanding where people come from and their, their own traumas. I think that's like the biggest thing.

And when I think back to that, that story I shared about like my fourth grade self, like I didn't have that culturally-centered care model to have someone ask me about my traumas. Or like, there wasn't this understanding that, oh, this is a Native kid who doesn't come from a lot of money, who maybe doesn't have the family support he needs to like, open up about something. Or, uh, whatever it is I'm going through.

Um,

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Wyatt Kelly: And now when I think about culturally-centered care and, and developing that training. I, that training actually like, came to mind based off of a, I was working with a tribe in Southern California and I had developed a published training. It was like in a podcast format, kind of like this, but it was really talking about history for new doctors who were gonna come work on like the reservation for the first time. So they could understand sort of why our people deal with certain things in comparison to the normal population.

So like one thing would be like high rates. Native folks deal with like higher rates of diabetes. And there's this term called weathering where what you would expect maybe a typical white man to have this at 50 years old. And Native populations are experiencing this at like 40 or 35. So like almost a 10 to 15 year difference. So we should be testing, like we far more in advance. If you're going into this community, you should be thinking like.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

Wyatt Kelly: Oh, I need to be thinking like this.

And, and that's like, in a sense, culturally-centered care. That's like understanding the culture you're working with and developing models around that.

And when I was at this IHS conference. So funny because it kind of ties back into that. There's an Indian Health Service conference where a lot of all these, health workers, doctors, psychiatrists, people were coming. And it was, it was the best practices conference. So it was talking about best practices and working in Indian health. And I was on a panel talking. I was talking about sexual health and like really connecting the dots with youth. And one thing that came out of that was like this big trust based relationship thing.

And it's the same thing. Like, you're not gonna go work at a hospital and expect a Native person to come in or a Native youth to come in and just start sharing their family history and start sharing like who they are and what they relate to.

And like, yeah, look, I love going to this dance ceremony, because it's means this to me. Like they're not just gonna open up and share that. Because it's, it's a trust thing. Like we don't just go around sharing our knowledge. And I think something clicked in that conference where I was like, I feel like trust is maybe the first big step towards even culturally-centered care.

I don't even know if we touched on that in our training that we developed. But it's something that I wish I could go back to and like add in a huge module just on like what building trust looks like for different communities, 'cause it's different for everyone, right?

Candice Schutter : That's right.

Wyatt Kelly: Now I'm thinking about culturally-centered care. And I'm like, the first main aspect of it is developing trust. And like being genuine, too.

And I talked about this at the conference. I was like, there'll be a lot of great doctors who will come and work on a reservation or will come and work in Indian Health. And they just do it to get their, like, medical loans forgiven. You know, they'll work on the reservation for five years. And they'll start to build these relationships. And like naturally they'll start to sort of gain some trust here and there with the community, but then they just like leave.

And that's just like, it just creates a inter-generational trauma in your head of like, everyone who comes here is just gonna leave. So it's like, how do, how do we build this new trust model?

And I think that all relates to culturally-centered care, what it means for like Native folks, but I'm sort of trying to think more broad around like culturally-centered care and like any avenue.

But I know like in our community. I know in our training we talked a lot about like sharing songs and storytelling and traditional medicine is huge. Like, I think for our people, like even just on a bad day or you have some bad energy or you really are, you go through an anxiety attack or something hits you really hard one day. You know, we'll have relatives come out and burn some medicine for you, whatever that is, from whatever your tribe, you know, if maybe it's white sage, maybe it's sweet grass, maybe it's cedar.

And we'll burn and we'll sing a song and get that traditional spiritual healing. And that right there is, that right there is health. That's wellness. And that's medicine, you know.

I've been super blessed to have another great mentor and a great friend of mine. You should definitely check her out. Her name's Sage, Sage LaPená. And she's a herbalist, like a traditional herbalist. And I think she's done like PBS podcasts and TV shows, but she has been an amazing mentor in terms of understanding. Like I will hit her up. Like I was dealing with this. I'll get, I'll get like a face rash and I've been trying to figure it out. I went to the doctors when I was younger for it, and they always try and prescribe me all these like steroids or pills or creams, all this stuff in it. And I'm like, there's something else.

And she's, she's actually a traditional doctor at the health center here. So she will understand every patient who comes in their tribal background, where they're traditionally from. If they were relocated. Like let's say me, my tribal heritage is from Arizona, but I've spent most of my life in California. So my blood, the weather I'm used to is different than someone who has my same blood, who's in Arizona. So she'll take all this into account and think about what traditional medicines were in that area that your people would've used and what your blood would really relate to.

And like I had a really bad rash and I'm not, and I'm not even doing the medicine that she told me to use right now, so I'm getting it back. But she was like, oh, you need to blend this herb with this. And then make ice cubes and then ice your face with this, and then take this. And I was doing all these things and it went away and like three days. And I texted her and I was like, man, that was amazing, Sage. And, and she's just like one of those people who understands the medicine that this world has to offer this outside space we're in.

And that right there is culturally-centered care too, for our people. You know, like instead of going to a doctor and being prescribed all these pain pills or these drugs like, what traditional medicines are out there that you can use to like heal yourself?

And we need more doctors like that. There needs to be more, more people like Sage in the world, for real.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. Well, and this holistic approach, and we're talking about culturally-centered care, and we're focused, you know, we're focusing on healthcare or mental health. But if we sort of zoom out even more, the course that we took together, Leading Diverse Teams. And we were talking about supporting diversity in general. And really sort of having a culturally-centered holistic approach to anything, right?

Any organization that you work in, to even like how a team meaning functions and the way that people speak up or don't speak up. There can be considerations around the culture someone grew up in, or there can be class differentials in terms of socioeconomics that are playing out. I mean, I came from a very low income family where I didn't speak up just because of that, right? There's, there's gender, race, there's spirituality. There's, there's so many things, so many facets of it.

And I think what I hear you saying is, is really taking the time to build a relationship so you can learn about those different things and understand that the way that we lead kind of varies based on the relationship, right?

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

Wyatt Kelly: I think it all comes down to too, like, uh, growing as, as an individual too. I mean, I haven't always thought the same way I think about the world now. And the way I view my relatives, all my relatives, my plant relatives, my human relatives, everything in between, you know. It's been through like growing as a person and, and going through my own struggles and learning and having mentors really helped me guide that.

Because, I mean, I think one thing that, I mean the, the, the way the world is right now is, is just so divided and there's just so much going on. And I think we need to. I mean, I think, I think a lot of humans have like lost, lost touch of like having empathy for, for each other. And like.

I don't know. I try when I'm in the world and walking around in, in my day to day, whether I'm like going to the gym or at the grocery store, I just try and always remind myself to like have a deep sense of empathy for the world around me. And understanding that, like you never know what anyone's struggling with. You never know, like what you can share. And I think living life with that model and like keeping that in the forefront of my mind has really helped me become a better leader. And, and become a more holistic person in general.

Because I mean, I can share. It was maybe like a couple months ago, one of my friends was visiting. And we ended up going to this bar just to get a quick drink downtown. 'Cause they have a pool table there, so we're like, let's go get a, get a quick beer and play some, play a game of pool.

And we're there and I'm getting a drink. And there's this guy at the, at the bar and he's just kind of like, uh, writing in a book. And then I, you know, I'm, I'm a person who, you know, there's so many people I feel like who they're just like in their own world. And I'm someone who always tries to like, just open up and talk to whoever it is. 'Cause you know, you can learn something from everyone.

So I just start asking him like, man, like what's going on? Like, what are you drawing over there? Like, that's super cool. And he starts opening up, oh, I'm just writing in my journal. And this is actually the first time, like he really started just opening up to me. He was like, this is the first time I've actually been out in public in months. And, you know, six months ago I lost my wife and my child in an accident. And yeah, it, it got really deep really quick. And he was sharing this whole story with me about losing his family. And I was just trying to listen and let him know like, you know, life's gonna be okay. And I'm just giving him just these little things.

And at the end of it, he closed this book and he, he was just gonna get up and leave. And he's like, you know, I really have to go, but I just wanna say, you really like shine some light in my life today, man. And like, I, I don't know if I would be here if it wasn't like for this conversation.

And it's like just those little tiny things and moments of like, let me just be a more open person and have empathy for whatever anyone's going through. Like, you never know. Like I think about that moment. And I just like, I don't know if that person was like really in a, in a bad state of like, no one's been there for them. And maybe they feel like suicidal or they feel like they're shouldn't be on this world. And it just took one human to say like, you know, people are here and we got you.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

Well, it's a powerful story. And you took it right to the place that my mind was going was if

the identity of leadership gets in the way of actual leadership, right? Of like you're just being in relationship to the world around you. The guy at the bar, you're just having a conversation. You're just a person whose heart and mind is open to relating to people and caring and giving back.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : That sounds like leadership to me.

Wyatt Kelly: I mean, me too. I think a lot of leaders. Leadership is like this term that is held up on this pedestal of like, oh, this person's in leadership. They're a manager or they're a director, or they're the CEO. And like, I don't know, it's so easy in the world today to just like develop egos. And like people get big on their ego because they feel like I'm in a position of power or I'm this leader.

And I've been so blessed to have mentors who have reminded me like, it doesn't have to be like that. You can be this person who's just like, you have that responsibility of being a leader, but it's not something you should say like, I'm this person. And I need to say like, yeah.

Like I, I admit all the time. I don't know everything. I don't even know if I have any answers at all half the time. But I just trying to be more of an inspiration to, to build bridges, I guess, like our training, building bridges.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : That's what we called it.

Well Wyatt, you know, I think I know like one of the things that drew me to you was, was your mind, 'cause I read your words first and then I engaged with you. And there's a effervescence and a contagion that you possess. And now that I'm getting to know more about what drives you, I see how much, how powerful you are as a model in terms of leadership that's authentic and grounded and open. And isn't at all attached to the hierarchy of said position

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : or whatnot.

'Cause I worked with you in a group. You bring a sense of, we're all leading this. Like we're all leading this together. We're all contributing. You show up with so much of yourself, a way that is so not full of yourself, that it just fills the space.

And it's like, what if everybody just shows up like this? Like here I am, everybody. And so it just invites that. And I feel like our group worked so beautifully together. And I think, you know, we all contributed in certain ways that led to that outcome. I feel like it became so rich and easy and fluid because we did that and I think you really were a great model for all of us.

Wyatt Kelly: Aw, thank you. Yeah, that was great. That was probably the best, I think team project I've ever had in my life honestly. It was so, so smooth and flowing. It was like, yeah, it was crazy.

But yeah, I don't know. I think I just, I try and lead in that way. And I don't even consider myself like a leader. Like I have elders and I'll have people invite me to conferences to talk and be like, you're a young leader, and this and that. And it's like, I am, but I'm not, you know. Because I'm really just kind trying to like be a, a messenger from everyone around me of like where things are going.

And like I said, I always point back to that idea of putting more youth in leadership positions and giving them the tools to grow in that way. And that's like, if I ever do make it in some crazy position that's like my number one thing is gonna be like, how can I get the younger people in these roles to share and feel like they can do it? Because I feel like a lot of it, it's about heart. You know, it's about your heart you're putting into. And not just, I worked 40 years in finance, so I should be a CEO or a manager. It's about that heart you're putting in and what you're giving back. That exchange.

So I, I just, I'm always thinking like that. And right now in my life, I'm always just trying to get better, like, just be a better human being, like a better person. Um, to my family, to like my, to my relatives, to my cat, to like, to whatever it is, like to a person at the grocery store. Just trying to get to be better. And like, I feel like if there's more models of that, those good people out there, like things will change naturally. Because people will be interacting with it and they'll see it and be like, huh, maybe I should like think about this. Or maybe I should try and be a little bit more like, open to saying something. Or maybe I should smile some more. Just say nice thing. Like I, even when I'm in public, I always put it on my mind to like compliment like 10 people on just one thing I love. Just so they can hear it. Just so people can feel up, feel that uplifted ness instead of feeling like so siloed. I just feel like there's so much of that in the world, and half the time I'm walking around, I don't see people like interacting in good ways.

Like, and you know, it's hard. The world's hard, a hard place. But that one comment can, like change, can start to create something. And it starts like a domino, a snowball effect. So I, I'm always trying to like.

Candice Schutter : That's the contagion.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : That's the contagion I speak of. And like your generous heart brings that out in others, but it's, it's generosity that's given without agenda. It just is. You are living your values out loud and it inspires other people to do it.

And I mean, knowing you has made me better as a person and as a quote unquote leader, whatever, and I have trouble with that label. But like that, that sense of like when we bring our full selves. 'Cause everybody else, somebody else has other special sauce, right? It's.

Wyatt Kelly: Exactly.

Candice Schutter : We bring our full selves to the interaction, and then it just ripples outward in every way.

And I think the biggest thing I'm getting is just how available you are life and to relationship and to connection. And you say like, I hope I have the opportunity to lead in a way that makes it so that you can give these opportunities. I know that you will. I know that you'll, because you're being who you, you're an embodiment of something that's vital, that wants to be carried forward. And it's just gonna happen for you. It just has to. And I think that that's you, in terms of modeling leadership really remind me of, is just to just really be super full in terms of the mission and like the embodiment of it. And then the rest takes care of itself. What your job title is, is sort of just platform for you to do more of that.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. No, I really appreciate that.

And I think when I, when hearing you say all of that and thinking about it, it makes me think about like, there was a time in my life where I didn't, I didn't live that. Like I wasn't being my full self. Or I didn't feel like the, I didn't have that internal confidence to just be my truth and like to, to say these things.

So I think that's also a huge thing I think about is like, trying to build that up in others to feel like you do have a voice and you do have, you are like, you are smart. You have everything that everyone else has, like, you have it all. So it's like you gotta just speak that and be yourself and, and be true to it.

And I think it goes back to, like I was saying with like social media and people are just scared to say anything, 'cause like someone's gonna attack you.

You just have to just do it. You just gotta just go for it. And, and, and live your truth. And people are, you know. No matter what, people are gonna hate you. They're gonna love you. There're there's gonna be, there's, you're never gonna make everyone happy. So you just gotta push forward and, and be the best version of yourself and, and try and grow in that way. And really blossom like that. That's, that's a huge thing for me too.

I think if anything, if I can just inspire some person from my whole story, even if it's the not the most academic or the most this or that. Like it's just, it is what it is.

Candice Schutter : Yeah, it's real.

So it's Native Heritage Month, and we want to celebrate with you, with all of you in ways that are honoring. And what can we do if, not just this month, but like in general to celebrate and support Native perspectives. What would you say to those of us who are outside of your communities? What, what do we need to know?

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah. I mean, I would just say I think the, the most minimal thing and one of the most easy and accessible things to do is like just share. Like, share on your socials about what other Native orgs are putting out. Look up whose land you're on right now currently,

and then look those tribes up and be like, what is tribal council posting? What are these Native orgs in my area posting about for this month? Or just in general? And just uplifting, like giving that platform even more, more views, more sight, um, to the world. Um, I think that's a, that's a such a simple thing that can be done more.

And I personally don't use social media as a personal choice, but, um, you know, so many people do. So it's like that's a way to get that knowledge out and share it, and then you never know where it'll take you. You know?

I know when you go on, like, I never had TikTok. And never have used a TikTok. But the youth love TikTok. So they're like showing me tiktoks, and I'm like starting to see how it works and I'm like, holy crap, this is crazy. So like, even just resharing one thing, like it can just build so much traction and before you know it, you have like 10,000 views. So I think that that's, that's the biggest thing is probably just sharing it.

And just, it's just uplifting Native organizations too, and the people doing the work. I mean, even just you giving me this opportunity to share space and, and to share a little bit about my own personal story and, and get this podcast out on, on whatever platforms you share it on is like, that's a huge thing right there. You know, hopefully people can take this and maybe go look into some of the folks I mentioned and look into the work they're doing and what's happening.

And I think that's a big thing is just giving us that, that platform to, to share and, and uplifting those who are, who are sharing too.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. Well, it's, it's an honor to platform you. Anytime you wanna come back, I'm happy to talk about anything. And I love hearing from you. And, we'll definitely in the show notes, link to some of the folks that you mentioned.

Wyatt Kelly: Yeah.

Candice Schutter : And any organizations you want to share with our listeners, so that we can, um, they can dive a little bit deeper and, and explore more.

Wyatt Kelly: A hundred percent. And I think people can go look into these folks and learn something, you know, amazing from, from each and every one of them. And I'm just been. I'm just so blessed to have been like, come across paths of people who have really. Like even you like, have helped me out in, in, in this. It's just, it's amazing, um, what we can create together, just uplifting good work. It's, it's, it's amazing and it's so beautiful.

So I can't thank you enough for, for like, bringing me on. And I, I hope everyone who listens, like they'll, they'll look into the show notes and go explore a bit more and check out the work we're doing, the work I'm doing and the work that everyone's really doing.

Candice Schutter : It's beautiful. It's, it's a time, it's a time for cross-cultural, collaborative coming together more than ever. I feel like it's just more important than ever. And so this conversation has been such a gift to me. And, um, I've enjoyed every second of it.

Wyatt Kelly: Oh, thank you. It's been amazing. Love. Blessings.

INTERVIEW ENDS

Candice Schutter: Thanks to Wyatt and to you for tuning in.

If in recognition of Native American Heritage Month, you would like to learn more about Wyatt's work and even make a donation, you can learn more in the show notes.

You'll also find links to the other resources that we mentioned in this episode. And in general, let's continue to center and celebrate Indigenous perspectives, not just this month, but every day.

I'll see you next time.