

Episode 16 with Dr. Faith Mwangi-Powell.

Wambui: Hey there Dr. Mwangi-Powell. Thank you so much for being here.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Thank you for having me. I'm excited to have a chat with you Wambui. It's always an honor to be with you. Thank you.

Wambui: I love talking to you all the time. You have all these nuggets that you share. So please tell my listeners who you are and what you do.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: As you said, Wambui, my name is Dr. Faith Mwangi Powell, and I'm the CEO of Girls Not Brides, the global partnership to end child marriage. We work across the globe to end child-early and forced marriage. And my work is to empower girls. My work is to work with communities. Organizations and everyone interested in raising the path, the profile of girls and really making sure that girls like you and I can unleash their dreams and be who they want to become. And marriage below the age of 18, marriage as children is not one way for them to really realize their dreams. So our work is to really make sure that those dreams of girls are unleashed and realized and achieved. By adding child marriage. So that's what I do.

Wambui: That's awesome. That's Rewarding work. I can imagine

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Rewarding, but it's hard work. Yes.

Wambui: Yeah, rewarding. And I'm sure it's hard. So what inspired you to empower women?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: I think I always think about my own mother's leadership journey, and I see that her own leadership journey was intertwined with mine. I thought I was supporting my mother in her journey, but actually, she was teaching me because as a young girl, I remember sitting with my mother, with her income-generating groups. I grew up in a village and in the village you used to find women having these income-generating groups because the women had not gone to school. They had no source of income and these income-generating groups were bringing women together so that they could share resources. I would remember sitting with my mother and her group and trying to read for them the bank statements and try to divide for them the money. And to me, I thought I was teaching them. But when I look back, I was being taught, I was being taught because for me, the dream of that

questions like why did these women not go to school? Yes, they are so clever. They are so sharp.

Wambui: Yes.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Why did they not go to school? And they are so innovative, even without education to speak of. And I thought I would like to go to school myself. So that is where my journey for empowering women kind of began. I didn't know then, but I know now that is where the journey began because I always feel my heart goes out to women everywhere I want women to be who they were born to be because we are all born for greatness.

That's what I believe.

Wambui: I believe we were all born for greatness. That's for sure. You're right. Yeah. And that's good. You are empowering your mother and she was teaching you and you are empowering her and her friends, but you didn't know that you were empowering them at that time.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: I did not know because I was very young and I thought it was just a chore. I loved, I love being with women and I also loved to hear the gossip because I sat there quietly counting their money, but listening to their stories. So I love that as well. But when I look back, I think that is where my dream of empowering women was born because I've always gravitated to work career things, and opportunities to foster other women and girls. So, because I know if I wasn't given that chance myself. I don't know where I'll be. So I'm always really grateful that I saw that at an early age and my dream to be better than my mother or to be, to achieve more than my mother had achieved, although, to me, she was a hero, I still wanted to be, too, to do much more than her. And she had bigger dreams for me as well. So that is where my dream was born. And I have carried this career for many, many years.

Wambui: And you have, and your journey in leadership has spanned across various sectors. How have these diverse experiences shaped your approach to leadership and impact?

Dr Mwangi Powell: I think what I have learned with all these different sectors is that leadership is the same. Regardless of what sector you are in, leadership requires courage. It requires competence. It requires to be able to have a strong character. So all those things are needed, wherever you are, whatever sector you are. If you are in a sector and you don't even know what the work is about, if you have no competence, you're not going to be an effective leader. If you don't have the courage to speak out. You are not going to be an effective leader. And if you don't have the character to really be able to work with everybody, you are not also going to be strong. So I think it's those things I have seen that it doesn't matter where you are. It

doesn't matter who you are leading. It doesn't matter whether it's in your own home or you need all those things together. Those things, I see as the key ingredients for strong leadership.

Wambui: And that's good that you bring that fact that even if it's in your own home, you're a leader because I was going to ask you, do you think leaders are just a certain number of people or a certain type of people are leaders or is everybody a leader?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: I think we are all leaders and sometimes we look at leaders because of their titles, but I remember reading a book a long time ago by Robin Sharma saying that we are all leaders without titles and sometimes we are better leaders when we are not playing to our titles. When we are just showing up as our authentic selves and being who we are, rather than showing up as a CEO or as a doctor, or as this, you just show up as faith, show up as Wambui. That is who you are. And when you show up as an authentic person, you bring your best. And if we build on that, then the other titles can come because the reality of life is that titles come and go.

But you remain you, whoever you are inside, you remain that is the most important thing. I think in terms of leadership, just cultivating that self-awareness and authenticity. It's so important. Because the title will not make you. Better if you're not, That's what we'll see.

Wambui: And I like that authenticity piece because a lot of us, you know, and I find a lot of because my audience is professional women. Sometimes they hold themselves back and they have a lot of fear of putting themselves out there and being their authentic self. Have you ever experienced self-doubt and imposter syndrome and how have you navigated it as a leader?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: We all experience self-doubt. I think we all go through those moments that you think, oh my goodness, this is for me too. Am I expected to be here? And you show up and you are pinching yourself thinking, and especially for somebody like myself who grew up in a rural village in Kenya, then you kind of enter some halls of power and you are thinking, Ooh, am I supposed to be here? You know, and you are looking around thinking, am I supposed to be with these big women? But that is common. But I think that it's what I have said, knowing the intrinsic values you hold, knowing who you are being self-aware, and also knowing that that moment is temporary. It's not going to be, but also knowing that everybody feels the same. You can be in their room and maybe 100 people feel the same and you are thinking I'm an imposter and I like the idea that just showing up. Do your best. Yes, you know why you are there. The fact that somebody invited you, or you are there, means you're supposed to be there, just owning the space, and sometimes that is what we fail to do you go and you start comparing yourself with others. And we also need to know that there is nobody like us. We are so unique. We

are unique beings. We are so unique. So the moment you start comparing yourself, you are really on a spiral because then you'd be like, everybody's better than you. But if you know you are a unique being, and I also have very strong faith. And I also believe that the Bible says that we are wonderful and fearfully made. So I always have that in the back of my mind to think. I'm supposed to be here. This is not an accident. This is an opportunity for me. To shine, Shine.

Wambui: Oh, I love that. An opportunity for me to shine.

When you have those moments of self-doubt, do you, and I know that you just said that you tell yourself, this is an opportunity for me to shine. How about those moments where you feel sometimes maybe, okay, this is something that I can do, you know, like, okay, what tools do you use? Do you have affirmations or declarations? I know some people use declarations and affirmations. What do you do?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: I think what I do, I remind myself of where I've come from. I remind myself of the things I've achieved. Yes, I remind myself of things that perhaps have been even more difficult than this and how I have overcome them. And I think as you navigate several sectors and different sectors, you will feel this, you even remind yourself of a moment when you felt self-doubt and the outcome was great. So I believe I kind of lean on my achievements. And I think I have been here before I have been on this road before. Yeah. So it could be something small. You can think maybe I did this speech over here and I was fine and everybody said it was good. So if you remind yourself of those things you have achieved, where you have won, because sometimes when you're in that moment of self-doubt, the moment what you want to put away is that negative spiral.

Of like, Oh, you know, I failed before I did this before, because we can also find that, but it's finding the positive things which happened. Before, like if there's something which happened before and you achieve, it's really always looking at that, but also thinking about feedback from trusted colleagues, like people have given you feedback in the past. Like I do a lot of public speaking and people tell me, Oh, that was great. Some people will be honest and say, that was not so great. Maybe next time do that. So it's also building on that feedback. I'm not strong on affirmations because I forget what I'm strong at. What I'm strong at is just thinking I've been here before I've done this before, and I can do this. But also thinking, about what's the worst that can happen. My father used to tell me that you have to think about what's the worst that can happen.

Wambui: Oh, wow. Your father told you that?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: He told me that as I was a young girl to always thought what's the worst that can happen? What's the realization that the fear you have? You are fearing nothing because nobody beat you up. Nobody will kick you out. You know,

so, so just thinking about that and being present as well. Those are the tools I use. And it's very interesting. Just recently, we had a meeting with Mrs. Obama, you know, in Malawi, and I was sitting next to her and we were talking and I was just thinking, Mhm. And I had a moment of self-doubt and I thought, I exactly, I was, I had a moment of doubt and I was like, am I supposed to be here? And it was not only Mrs. Obama. It was Mrs. Obama. It was Amal Clooney. It was Melinda Gates. Three phenomenal women. Yes. I'm supposed to facilitate a dialogue with them on child marriage. And I'm sitting them around this table. And for a moment, I thought. Oh, that self-doubt really crept in, but the thing that really helped me at that moment was to say, I'm an expert in this issue. I know this issue. I can talk about the issue of child marriage in my sleep.

Wambui: Mrs Obama cannot talk about it, but you can talk about it.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: I can talk about it in my sleep. So I, that kind of, all of a sudden I was upright and let's do this. So it's to remind yourself. All those things, are great tools to work on when you're having self-doubt, but to also know it happens to everyone.

Wambui: Happens to everyone.

That's good to know. Now, you've also emphasized the importance of mental health in leadership. How can leaders prioritize mental well-being and, especially in high-pressure environments?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: I think that the key thing mental health has actually become quite a big issue, as we all know, and we need to pay serious attention to mental health. And the biggest challenge around mental health is workload pressures burnout, not organizing our time and self-care, the problem we have as leaders. We don't take care of ourselves. We think our responsibility is to take care of others. Okay. But you can never pour from an empty cup. Sure. You can't. You know that. You can't. So you need to self-care. You need to take care of yourself. You need to set clear boundaries as well. You need to take time to rest. And we don't sometimes do that. We don't rest. We don't take care of ourselves. We are always working 24 hours, emails, deadlines, meetings, whatever. And we forget that if we are not good, the people we lead are not going to be good. We need to set boundaries in our work. I was listening to one of your guests who says they delete all their social media apps. And I was so inspired. I was like, we need to do things like that. To know what are the boundaries I have to do. You don't have to be on call. And I always say we are not at the surgical ward where it's life and death. We need to make sure that we stop. Yes. And recharge take care of ourselves and relax. Go have a walk. Go listen to music. Go dance. Go laugh. Whatever you like to do. Find things for things you like to do. Because of those things. It's an investment in yourself. Okay. So I always say that is so important. And as you take care of yourself if you show up strong. You're setting not only good examples for those around you.

But you're also setting good examples for yourself.

Yourself.

That is absolutely important that we do that.

Wambui: And it's good to model the way because if you're not taking care of yourself, you're not doing a very good way to your, okay.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Exactly. Exactly. As a leader. Absolutely. So you have to really make sure that you are modeling that because people think if my boss is working until eight, maybe I need to work until 8:30, you know, so we need to be, to be careful, what messages we are sending by our behavior. So our behaviors are. Absolutely important.

Wambui: Exactly. Yeah. And they take time off and they're seeing you. She's still on Skype. Oh, she's still working.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Exactly. Yeah. I actually sometimes put my Skype into busy because I just want people to know I'm offline, but sometimes I'll be doing something, which is perhaps not very good, but just modeling that good behavior is good.

Wambui: Yeah. Now, your insights on purpose-driven leadership are very inspiring. How can leaders align their personal values with their professional goals, for greater impact?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: It's important that we know that our values are not separate from our goals. Sometimes, we have our values over here and our goals over here. I think they need to be integrated. We need to work on our values.

We need to identify and be self-aware. What are our values and then align those to our goals? Because if your values are not aligned with your goals, one of them is going to be compromised.

So it's, making sure we don't compromise. What it is we want to achieve and how do we align those two as well? It's so important that we are aware of that.

Wambui: Okay. Now, which one comes first? Is it first you have to have your values and then have the goals aligned to these values?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: I think we, our values come first because our values define who we are. Our goals don't define who we are. Our values define who we are.

So like I can say one of the values I have is kindness.

My goals are going to be aligned. However I do, I want to do everything in a framework of kindness.

I can say my value is that I want justice. So I'm going to value work in line with that value of justice. Like I want everybody to be free from child marriage, for example.

So our values really are the pin. Who we are. It's what I talked about earlier about being authentic. We cannot be authentic if we don't align with our values and who we are. So that comes first. Then we can say, okay, as a leader now, what are my goals? These goals need to also be defined in two ways. What are my personal growth goals? Goals.

Because we never arrive. We never think now I've arrived as a leader. And now I know everything. There's got to be a great opportunity is a learning opportunity, even this, the self-doubt we talked about. Yeah. It's a moment of growth. Yes. It's a moment, of opportunity. Yeah. So we need to align those personal goals and professional goals, because how our strong selves will drive how our professional self looks as well.

Wambui: I believe personal development is the basis for professional development.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes.

Wambui: So first, you know, your values, your personal goals, and then, and that development, once you know who you are, that's going to help you as you are growing professionally too.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Yes, absolutely.

Wambui: Now, in your opinion, what steps can an individual take to cultivate resilience and confidence, especially when facing setbacks, in their professional journey?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: So, I think it kind of links to what I was talking about that you, for you to come with the resilience, you have to have a growth mindset, right? We are never born resilient. These are things we have to always wake up with a growth mindset that when we get a challenge is to really think, and I like this question a lot. What is this challenge teaching me? What am I supposed to learn from this experience? You need to always ask yourself that question. We never ask that question it often enough. Because when a challenge comes, the first thing is to be overwhelmed and to complain.

Right. And then say life is happening to me and life and it's happening. Exactly. And we say, why is it so hard? Why is so, and so, so difficult? Why is this like so difficult? Rather than saying, what do I need to do? Or what do I need to learn from this experience? So that next time. I'll be better prepared. So it's always having the growth. I call it the growth mindset because we are resilient beings, we are, if you see what we have overcome Oh my goodness. COVID, whatever No, yes, COVID. Exactly. So, we are born with that capability. But I also see that capabilities like a muscle, you know, the way you have to go to the gym and train to have better abs and to build it. We also have to build our resilience muscle rate. And the way we build our resilient muscle is through the challenges we

face. If, everything is comfortable and nice and no challenge, no problem, no growth, no growth, you are not going to grow. You are not going to, to, to be better. But those heartaches I look back and I like the end of the year because I look back and I think, and this has taught me and I think, January was so hard, February was like this, we overcame. And I remember. My dad, again, he's an amazing man who's going to be with the Lord, I hope. And he was like, these two will pass.

Wambui: Oh my goodness. Your dad, would say that too?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: He would say that these two will pass. And, I had that when we were, I think during COVID that became like an I can walk the bus where these two will pass. And I remembered him saying, if you pass, you will look back. So when you are in that problem place, think about this time next year, when that problem will no longer be a problem, and see yourself as an overcomer you have overcome, and that is the growth mindset. But sometimes we see ourselves in a defeated space that is very hard to force to perceive ourselves in victory.

Wambui: Wow.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: So that growth mindset is absolutely important and that's what we do.

Wambui: Now, would you say that your faith also has helped you be able to overcome setbacks whenever you've had setbacks maybe?

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Absolutely. I always say that I'm so fortunate that I grew up in faith and again, it's so interesting because it's just like my leadership journey. My faith is from my grandmother. Okay. I kind of was carried by her faith. She was such a woman of faith that she was a woman. I would go to her house and tell her Shosho. We used to call her shosho and now say, we need to pray. Can you pray for me for these things? I always used to go to her. Like. Yeah. So my problems. And one day she said, my dear girl, you can also pray for yourself. Do you know you can pray for yourself?

Wambui: Oh, that's empowering.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: And that transformed my mindset. I'm like. Even me, even me, God can listen to me, you know, well, you know, because my sister was this big, gregarious woman and was in charge, I think, for all her life and you know, the Bible, like she would, read the vernacular Bible like she would quote these verses, you know, it was amazing. So to me, I thought it was only people like her. Who can speak to God?

So if I had a problem, let me go to the people like her who can, as I didn't think I was worth it. And she taught me that. And that has also stayed with me that my first

thought of calling in the morning is just to go and pray and say, even when I don't have time to say, help me for this day, guide me for this day. I don't need to say many things. Just guide me for this today. guide the conversations, guide the discussions. Thank you. Thank you. And that's it. If I don't have time, if I have time, I will do more and I'll read and all that. And, and I see that as I've grown older, my faith has also become stronger. I think I've learned to lean harder. And leave all of that to God for just bringing me here because I know I look back where I've come from. And I think this is not the power of man. This is not man.

Wambui: Only God,

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Only God, because I know I've come far from far.

Wambui: It sounds like you were raised by such powerful women because your mother, there she is, empowering you, then your grandmother, showing you that you have everything within you.

Go and pray, you have it within you.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Yeah, I was, I owe them, I always say. And, you know, I'm sure you had this, this saying, which says that the giants, we upon the shoulders, we start those to me, while the giants upon the shoulders, I stood. And now the call we have is to be giants ourselves so that others can step on our shoulders.

Wambui: And you're doing a beautiful job with the work you're doing. You are.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Thank you.

Wambui: And the girls advocating for us standing on your shoulders. So thank you so much for what you're doing now. I could talk to you. I like talking to you a lot, but I want to thank you for your time. So please tell my listeners where they can find you.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: So they can find me on LinkedIn. That's a channel I use a lot and it's at Faith Mwangi Powell. They can find me on Twitter on the same X actually it's called X these days. It's the same, at Faith Mwangi Powell. And they can also find me. On Facebook, although I stopped doing Facebook. In fact, I've now gone into Instagram, which is a new thing. So you can find me there again at Faith Mwangi Powell. So I use my full name. So if you Google Faith Mwangi Powell on those platforms, you'll find me.

Wambui: I will make sure that I link all those your social media handles in my show notes. And you so much for being here.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Thank you for having me. I've enjoyed chatting with you and thank you for what you're doing. You're inspiring women. And I, I've been so inspired as well as I listened to all your other guests and thank you for having me.

Wambui: You're welcome.

Dr. Mwangi-Powell: Thank you.