

# DO GOOD TO LEAD WELL

WITH CRAIG DOWDEN, PHD



Todd Kashdan



Craig Dowden

## Episode: The Power of Curious Leadership with Todd Kashdan

### What You'll Learn

- ✓ The Importance of Curiosity in Leadership
- ✓ Understanding the Upside of Negative Emotions
- ✓ Principled Dissent and Its Value
- ✓ Navigating Social Hierarchies
- ✓ The Balance of Dissent and Toxicity

# The Importance of Curiosity in Leadership (02:49)

Curiosity is a foundational trait for effective leadership because it encourages openness, creativity, and deeper connections within teams. Leaders who model curiosity show others that asking questions and exploring new ideas is not only accepted but valued. This creates a culture where diverse perspectives are welcomed, and team members feel encouraged to contribute, even if their views differ from the norm.

Practicing curiosity can help reduce social anxiety, as people shift focus from internal worries to outward interest in others' ideas and experiences. When leaders respond openly to dissent or new suggestions, they communicate a powerful message that innovation and engagement matter more than conformity.

## Actionable Insights:

- At the start of meetings, explicitly invite questions and unusual ideas to set a tone of exploration.
- When someone offers a different perspective, ask a follow-up question (e.g., "What do you imagine happening if we try your idea?") to show genuine interest.
- Use meta-commentary or "front loading": briefly explain at the outset that unexpected views are valued and that team members are encouraged to embrace the uncertainty of exploring new territory.



# Understanding the Upside of Negative Emotions (12:00)

Negative emotions such as anger, guilt, or even mind-wandering have practical value. For example, anger about injustice has historically fueled major civil rights advances, while a moderate sense of guilt can keep us connected to ethical standards.

The “upside of your dark side” means acknowledging that all emotions have a function; rejecting or suppressing them can hinder personal and team development.

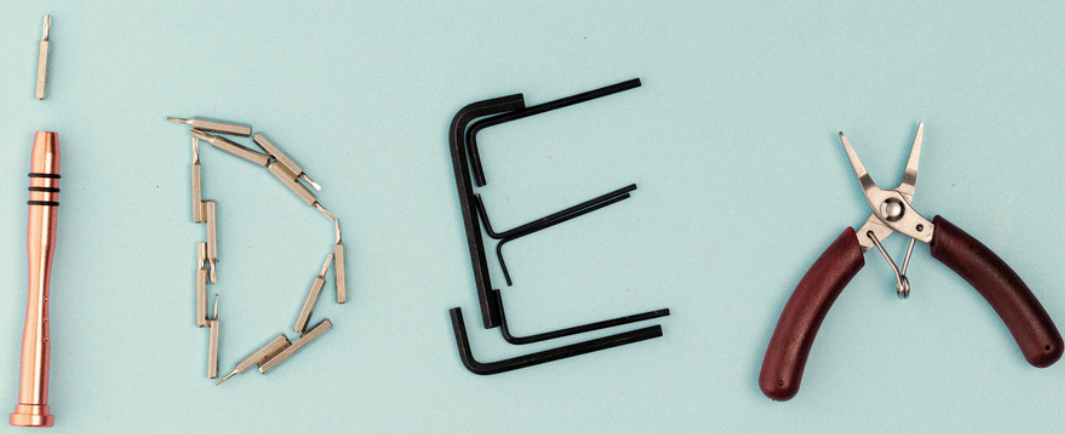
The key is to use these emotions constructively, channeling discomfort into productive action rather than denial or avoidance.



## Actionable Insights:

- The next time you experience a strong negative emotion, pause and get curious, ask yourself what message it might be trying to send.
- Facilitate spaces for teams to discuss uncomfortable feelings and how they can be leveraged for learning or change, rather than ignored.
- Encourage yourself and others to differentiate between harmful rumination and productive discomfort—use the latter as fuel for action or innovation.





## Principled Dissent and Its Value (14:53)

Principled dissent involves the courage to challenge problematic norms, behaviors, or decisions, especially within established hierarchies. It is not about being contrarian for its own sake, but about speaking up for improved outcomes, justice, or group integrity, even if it means risking disapproval.

Crucially, principled dissent helps organizations avoid groupthink and surface better solutions, as it brings hidden issues and new perspectives into the open. Being strategic about how and when you dissent, sometimes privately, sometimes publicly, maximizes your influence and reduces personal or group friction.

Leaders and organizations benefit from creating clear pathways for respectful disagreement to ensure the best ideas rise to the surface.

### Actionable Insights:

- Identify allies before raising dissent; encourage a respected colleague to help amplify your message.
- Advocate for anonymous input methods in group settings to reduce status pressure and encourage honest feedback.
- Set a personal intention to seek 80% approval, not 100%; being too focused on being liked can dilute your impact as a principled dissenter.

# Navigating Social Hierarchies (17:38)

Social hierarchies are an inevitable aspect of organizations and groups, influencing who feels empowered to speak up and who remains silent.

Recognizing the hidden dynamics of power and status helps both leaders and individuals navigate these realities more effectively. Leaders have the responsibility to actively seek out perspectives from those with less power or different backgrounds, as this drives true cognitive diversity and innovation.

Rather than fighting hierarchy itself, the goal is to make hierarchies function more fairly by ensuring dissent and unique contributions can surface without penalty. Calibrating your approach, sometimes stepping up boldly, sometimes inviting input from quieter voices, is key to organizational health and inclusion.

## Actionable Insights:

- Leaders should regularly rotate meeting chairs or facilitators. This helps redistribute authority, encourages participation from a wider range of voices, and breaks routine power structures that might stifle innovation.
- Use private, 1:1 check-ins to solicit feedback from team members who may feel inhibited in group settings. Not everyone is comfortable speaking up publicly, so offering quieter or more reflective individuals the chance to contribute in private can uncover valuable perspectives that might otherwise be missed.
- When you have positional power, make a point to acknowledge and give credit to dissenters or those who challenge your views constructively.
- Employ anonymous “brain writing” or digital suggestion boxes before meetings to gather ideas and input. This approach allows all team members, including those lower in the hierarchy or those with social anxiety, to contribute their thoughts without fear of judgment or reprisal, broadening the diversity of perspectives considered.



## **The Balance of Dissent and Toxicity (21:02)**

Dissent can easily tip from constructive to toxic if it becomes persistent negativity, aggression, or is used to serve personal agendas over group welfare. The safeguard against this is to create and uphold group norms that value a diversity of opinion but also require respect, empathy, and shared purpose. Effective dissenters work within the team, focusing on solutions and remaining accountable to the group's broader mission. Leaders can clarify boundaries by inviting disagreement at set points in decision-making, and establishing systems (like anonymous feedback) for raising concerns before actions are taken. Ultimately, dissent only strengthens a group if it's coupled with a commitment to the group's overall health and success.

### **Actionable Insights:**

- Establish clear norms for disagreement in your group, make it explicit that all voices are welcome, but respect and constructive intent are mandatory.
- Before major decisions, offer opportunities for private or anonymous dissent so those uncomfortable with public disagreement can still be heard.
- As a leader or peer, model how to transform criticism into actionable improvements, when others dissent, thank them and guide the conversation toward resolution and next steps.

# DO GOOD TO LEAD WELL

WITH CRAIG DOWDEN, PHD

Ready to transform your leadership with curiosity?

Connect with Todd Kashdan:

- Website: <https://toddkashdan.com/>

For a deeper dive, listen to the full-length episode of the Do Good to Lead Well podcast featuring Todd Kashdan on:

- [Spotify](#)
- [Apple Podcasts](#)

And if you're looking to elevate your entire C-Suite leadership team, learn how Craig Dowden can help your leaders perform at their highest level.

- visit <https://www.craigdowden.com/executive-mastermind>