

Speaker 1: Hello and welcome to leadership in challenging times on the NorQuest college podcast, hosted by Dr Jodi Abbott, President and CEO of NorQuest college and Lieutenant, Colonel JC Wilson, third Canadian division headquarters with the Canadian army. This podcast will discuss challenging and difficult topics affecting community, business and soldiers alike. The presenters may at times express their personal opinion or take a contrary position to expand the conversation ranging from leadership to sensitive subjects to current affairs. The podcast. We'll tackle issues in an open manner with an eye on identifying and expanding ideas from all sides of the discussion. Jodi and Jeff will now start the podcast.

Jodi Abbott: Hi everyone. Podcast number 13 leadership in challenging times. We're very, very pleased today to welcome Jamil Jivani. Jamil is an emerging leader who tackles some of the biggest challenges in the world today as a lawyer, a community organizer, and a teacher. He is the founder of the citizen empowerment project, which is a community outreach and public education organized organization focused on law and policy issues of national interest. Jamil is a graduate of Yale law school, very, very impressive and currently teaches at Osgoode Hall Law School at York University. He is born and raised in the Toronto area and has recently put out a new book, Why Young Men. It was published in April, 2018 and we are very pleased to have Jamil here at NorQuest college as keynote speaker of our civil society speakers series. Welcome Jamil.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Jodi Abbott: I wonder if you could start by giving our listeners just a sense of who you are and what your story is because I think it's a great place to start.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah, well I'm a, I'm Canadian, born and raised in the Toronto area. A lot of my work comes out of a personal experience I had of being a very disengaged in low achieving student growing up so much so that at the age of 16, I was considered illiterate by the Ontario public school system and I had a, you know, pretty dramatic kind of turnaround after that. By the time I was 25, I graduated from Yale Law School and was a lawyer. And so a lot of my work comes in trying to understand how those changes occurred in my life, what happened that empowered me and prepared me to achieve things I couldn't imagine growing up. Um, and how do I replicate some of that opportunity and support and self-initiative and self-empowerment in the lives of other people. So that's a big part of my work.

Jamil Jivani: And you know, I'm trained as a lawyer, but I tend to look at a lot of problems as much as I can as non-legal issues. Right. How do we empower people culturally in our families and how we treat each other? I try to take it very grassroots approach to solving problems. I also grew up in a mostly newcomer community in the suburbs of Toronto. My father came to Canada from Kenya and my mother is the daughter of Irish and Scottish immigrants to Canada after World War II. So I, you know, I think my experience in cultivating an identity for myself and finding a way to feel like I belong in Canada and really coming to own my Canadian identity is also a big part of my story and a lot of what I write and talk about as well.

Jodi Abbott: So just hearing that initial introduction, I will, I would think that there was going to be a lot of linkage to NorQuest college and our student population because 60% of our student population are born outside of Canada. So I really look forward to hearing your stories and particularly of identity of where do I fit and we're really interested in how does that then translate into leadership whether we are teaching in the college whether we're middle management and working with a very diverse student population. How do we learn from you and your experiences so that we can take that into our leadership and mentorship.

JC Wilson: And it's the same for the armed forces as well. I mean, we, you know, we talked about that before we started. You know, there's lots of relevant stuff here for everybody. Every citizen of Canada. And I was really struck as I read your book and I listened to your podcast that, you know, there's the, the tone and the flavor of the things about community, which really struck me and I, I would tell everybody of our listeners, you gotta listen to your podcasts. Your podcast is the road home, right?

Jamil Jivani: Yeah.

JC Wilson: At home. Great guests. And I, the one I've seen to Jodi when I came in here, uh, your one on community safety. That fantastic. I've listened to that like five times now cause I just think it's so, so relevant. But I wanted to ask you a question, sort to get the ball rolling. And I fear today that the press and media culture society in some ways and social media is framing all of our discussions around identity and everything that makes us different as people and not enough, I think on the common ground in community and what makes us the same. Want to start off talking about that?

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. Well I think you're absolutely right. A lot of the context I think I'm writing in or doing the work I do in is trying to build some of those, those linkages between people. I think it's easy for us as individuals to understand our problems in such unique ways, right? Because we are ourselves, we are so confined in some cases by our own subjectivity that it, it makes sense to us to think that there are things that are so unique to us that create a unique kind of adversity or mean that we experienced the world in ways that other people can relate to. And that is true of course, to some extent. The problem is when that becomes our defining impulse in our politics, it defines how we view broad cultural issues to the point where we underplay or completely overlook the reality that most of us have far more in common than we sometimes assume.

Jamil Jivani: So, for example, in all the work I do, a really common thread is that, you know, whether I'm speaking to middle class kids who have been in Canada for 10 generations or newcomers or people who are you know, live on reserves and you know, the middle of the country a common thread in the lives of all these people is we have a fairly similar sense of what we'd like our life to be like, right? We, we want to be safe. We want to feel loved. We want to have other people we can love. We'd like maybe a bigger house or a better car or a job right there. There's just a basic sense I think of what a good life means for so many people. And when we lose sight of that, it means that we aren't learning from what might be working in the lives of some folks to empower others, right? Because we define everyone's problems as being so different that the solution start to look different. But I think if you dig past our superficial differences and get a sense of what

every young person, every student, every, everyone who just wants a different life than what they've gotten now, anyone who thinks the status quo isn't good enough, I think we'd like to move in a similar direction. And we do that a lot easier when we're learning from each other and supporting each other than when we're trying to fight these battles all on our own.

JC Wilson: **Yeah. I was gonna say, do you think it's, it's something, cause we had, we had a long discussion about social media now on one of our podcasts that social media is, is great tool. But I even read in your book as well about if you will, I use the term weaponization of Twitter and other things where it reinforces those, those small groups. Rather than bringing everybody together as a community.**

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. I mean social media is one of those things where there's such a high volume of messages that people are receiving. It's such a high volume of content you're being exposed to. And within that you have such wide variability of what you could be looking at, right? Like there are activists I know who use social media to fight the stigma against mental health. And they start amazing conversations about what people otherwise might be going through in private. Right? And those are moments that remind me of the beautiful power social media can have in helping someone who might otherwise feel alone and in a state of despair, remind them that they're actually connected to a lot of other people who are feeling and experiencing the same things. But then you have the other ways that social media gets used, where it actually becomes a way to further alienate you, right?

Jamil Jivani: Where you start to feel like everything's contentious, everything's an argument, everything's a fight. And people go on social media and all they're reminded of is negativity and toxicity in the relationships that people have within one another. So it, it really is one of those things where it's a bit of a black box and it's it. It depends on how you use it and what you're exposed to in so much of it just kind of random. At the same time, there was a great conversation that Joe Rogan had on his podcast recently with the founder of Twitter, Jack Dorsey. And even I think Twitter has to recognize that the, the broad variability of how its platform is being used and it's hard for them to seek to I guess, cope with the reality that I don't think you can make it a purely positive tool, that there are going to be ways for people to use it in negative ways.

Jamil Jivani: And in some cases, I guess that's what a platform that reflects the diversity of human thoughts and experiences and political views is inevitably going to look like. Right. But I think in terms of it being let's say a divisive influence, I do think social media can do that and a lot of it comes down to those echo chambers like it is, it's scary sometimes when you look at the research of how if you hold a particular view on a subject, you could surround yourself with a social media ecosystem that never challenges your views and instead just makes you think that it is so common sense that everyone thinks like you, that when you encounter someone who doesn't, you think they're immoral, irredeemably flawed, a bad person. And that is such a toxic starting point for any kind of dialogue.

JC Wilson: **No, I ain't relationship. I mean, you just can't, you can't have that and start off with such a negativity at the start because then you don't have, as you put a, you know, those really good conversations, those hard conversations. Okay.**

Jodi Abbott: **So somewhat related to that, what I'm hearing is with social media, you can gravitate to something you believe that may not be positive. It could be so unique that it's grabbing you in a bad way. And something in your book that, that you identify is that you nearly fell into many traps that young men on a detour away from success. So pulling them away from success and in that, what do you mean by traps? And so when you were growing up, what were those traps and, and how then did you say, I'm going to steer away from them? What was it in you or in your environment or what you sought in your environment or what you sought from social media that helped you not to go there?**

Jamil Jivani: Yeah, when I say trap, I mean negative influences that convince you that you're doing the right thing and because that's, those are the ones that are hardest to get away from. So what I mean by that is, you know, growing up in a neighborhood where, you know, all the kids are older than the houses they lived in. And we were either us or our parents were so new to Canada that we were in some ways the left to fend for ourselves. In terms of developing a culture and an identity and a community, we were drawn to the lowest hanging fruit, right? And for my generation, what was so easily available to us was pop culture that represented men and young men in particular in what I would regard as self-destructive ways, right? So criminals, gangsters misogynists people who use violence to express themselves, who celebrated a really kind of reckless materialism and more, I think harmful than anything, a certain kind of moral relativism is what I think we were introduced to.

Jamil Jivani: And what I mean by that is a way of thinking about the world, where your own struggles define what is okay for you to do. So if you don't have enough money, it's okay to sell drugs. If you don't feel supported, you can take that anger and frustration out on someone else, right. And become a violent person. And what that meant for me was that I, you know, glorified a certain kind of gangster subculture that was introduced to us through movies and through music. And it was a multibillion dollar industry that a lot of people got rich off of, but for kids who look to those entertainers as more than entertainers, but as you know, clerics as role models as, um, almost like they're priests, right? People who are supposed to communicate wisdom to you. Then that, that behavior that someone might look at and say, that's just fun.

Jamil Jivani: We looked at it and took it really seriously. Right? So when I say a trap, I mean it made us think we were being successful because we thought that's what success look like. You know, you get attention from girls at school, you think that you have money because you've got a bunch of cash, right? You, your friends have money, your friends are in and out of jail, like the people you see in the movies, right? It feels like you're living this fairy tale life that is cool and exciting and that's what it becomes a trap because you have a false sense of reality. Um, and that was my particular circumstance, but I think that variations of that true for a lot of people right? Like, even on that, when we talk about social media, so much of the challenge of social media is that it can, can give people false idols.

Jamil Jivani: It can give you someone that you look on Instagram or Twitter on Facebook and you think that's what success looks like. You Mimic those behaviors. You adopt that value system, but it turns out that that's actually not the key to a happy, safe, secure life. Right? And I think very clearly for instance, of like, you know, Instagram models, right? That a lot of young people want to copy. But the truth is that that's not the surest path to a healthy and happy life. Right? So, so those are the kinds of traps, I mean, where you start to conflate your identity with certain behaviors that actually aren't good for you and what that means and practices that the things that are fundamental like getting a basic education. Thinking about what kind of career you want to have understanding enough about how the world works.

Jamil Jivani: So you might be in a position to own a home or a car one day, right? I mean, those kind of basics that a lot of people take for granted, you start to not even pay attention to because you're chasing something that is so fantastic. Right? So those are the traps that concern me because I think, you know, a lot of my work focuses on young men, but this is not a problem that's unique to young men where you have people who are so fixated on these false senses of what success looks like, that they lose a lot of really important years of their life and time that they should have been learning, growing, challenging themselves. They, you know, get swept up by ideologues or they get swept up by crime and, and extremism and just ideologies that want to prey on young people who are ambitious and willing to give their, their life and their energy and their time to a cause. Whether that causes, helping our drug dealer get rich or an extremist build, a following or whatever it might be. It's a similar departure, I think from what anyone could objectively say is good for that young person.

Jodi Abbott: So, given that we are a postsecondary institution and we work with young people you know, they've come through high school, they may be someone who's got a degree coming back. Sometimes people will be lost and, and they won't quite know where my trying to fit. What am I trying to do? What kind of, what are the things that teachers as mentors or other leaders in the college can look for to say this is maybe what's going on and what, what's something practical that they can do as, as a leader in their classroom, in their institution when they see this?

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. Well that, that's related to I suppose how I was able to escape some of those traps too because a really important part of my story is that I was, when I made it out of high school and I was in college I went to Humber College in Toronto. That was the community college system was my changing point, right? I mean that is where I got a different kind of support than I had ever experienced before. And what worked well, I think above all is making sure that a young person, whether you're concerned about him or her or not, has dialogue in their life, meaning that they're talking to adults about what they're reading by them, by when they're by themselves, how they feel, what they're experiencing. Because what that does is it gives them the opportunity to share what's going on in their lives and the kinds of distractions that might be sucking up their energy and taking them away from the discipline they need in order to do well.

Jamil Jivani: But what it also means is that it gives them a chance to be challenged, right? It's very different I think between, articulating an idea to someone else and seeing how they respond to it versus sitting by yourself on a phone or an iPad and, and try thinking, you

understand that the way the world works by herself. Right. I, I actually think a lot about when the Charlottesville rally happened a couple of years ago and led to our young protester being killed by an extremist. A bunch of postsecondary students, university students, college students were involved in that and a lot of them were embarrassed because their faces came out, right, as rally attendees, right? As white supremacists. And, and the reason that's always sticks with me is because they had never before actually been associated with their beliefs because no one had ever talked to them about these things.

Jamil Jivani: No one, they had never had to look at someone's face and say, this is what I believe, right? I believe I am a racist. I believe in these things. Instead, they had just, it was an online culture. They're by themselves, they're with their peers who are telling them this is the right way to look at the world. And then they go and they wind up on TV and it's like they're shocked by what it feels like when people look at you and know what you're believing and what you're thinking privately. And that's an extreme example, but, but what that I think is revealing is that when you build those connections with adults and you're able to have that dialogue, you don't go so far before you realize, I'm actually embarrassed by what I think is true.

JC Wilson: **Or the ideas aren't what well founded. Exactly. You know, you haven't had a chance to test those, those arguments with somebody else because when you went to test it in that closed group, you were always successful. And having that ability to have a difficult conversation. Because that, for me, that's one of the thing that really struck me throughout your book is that you're touching on things in this book. This book would catch fire in certain circles just because it's, you're talking frankly about issues that people just right now, and I know it in your podcast, say they would self-censored the discussion. They would, they wouldn't even bring up the discussion to talk about it, but are those really complicated discussions that need to be had so that we can get meaningful solutions to problems?**

Jamil Jivani: Precisely. And that's where the idea of dialogue comes in, right? Because it's like are you creating space for people to say what they're thinking and believing? Or are you only creating space for people to say what you'd like them to say? Right? And that's a really important difference. If someone has a flawed way of understanding the world and comes into your school, right? And comes to your classroom or enters your workplace, the idea should be that they are sharing what they're thinking and if that's a concern, then you can work with them to challenge their mind, right? But otherwise you're just, you're creating spaces that are exclusive to people and even if they have the wrong ideas, the ability to articulate them as important I think.

Jodi Abbott: **And it's interesting, at the college, one of the things we've been talking about with our leaders is how do you create the right environment to, one, have difficult conversations, but two, talk about failures in a way that isn't going to expose you to the point where you're not willing to bring it forward. But that we actually learn from it. And if you create an environment where only this type of thinking is okay, you're not going to encourage the conversation about, well, what didn't work because we went down this road. And to me it's a very interesting dilemma and possibility in an institution when we're trying to be very, very entrepreneurial. We're trying to say to**

leaders, you know, we expect good outcomes. We expect people to work hard and we also expect you to fail and talk about failing. And if you are not comfortable having that open conversation about failing one, how will we ever know we made a mistake? And two how do we actually ever move forward? And, and I see synergy there with what you're saying because if you cannot have a conversation, how can you ever propel your employees, your leadership skills and therefore your organization. And for us it's really about changing lives and transforming communities. And I'm, I'm so glad you gave a really good plug for Humber College because community colleges do make a difference. They create that.

JC Wilson: Yeah, one of the things I wanted to ask about because I think we're, we're on the same, we're all on the same vibe. We all, we're all agreeing with each other and which is the danger would mean we need to create some controversy. But I specifically wanted to ask you about in your chat one of your books, you talk about a point in your life where it resonated with you that your moral compass was in a different position than a fellow named Lucas. And I found that very captivating because if you look through in the military, we've had specific moral challenges that we've had to face and we've got certain rules and regulations and concepts and some people will argue, you know, where their morals fit and, and, and how it fits in. But the only person understands that is the individual. And they learned that from the environment that they're in and their belief structure and everything else. And I know that's a big component in your chapter there. Could you expand on that? Cause I found that very captivating, that part of the book.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. Well, what I write about there is when my best friend at the time wound up getting into trouble with the justice system and seeing his crime described in a crime stoppers press release. And just seeing how other people might perceive him and understand his behavior was very jarring. And I, that's where it kind of dawned on me that some of the morals that I had taken for granted is making sense to us in our particular context didn't make much sense when you push yourself outside of that little bubble we lived in. Right. That being violent is actually pretty inexcusable. But we had in this this sub culture that celebrates gangs and criminals, and then you had, had been normalized to us in a way that was disturbing. Right. I came to see as disturbing, but on the idea of a moral compass, I mean, a lot of it came, I think in my life from having people who I thought I didn't pay much attention to people who I thought weren't a big influence on me. At the time, right. Like a mom that I had who was the only one of my two parents. He stuck around and I spent so much time as a kid being angry about the parents that wasn't there, that I didn't really think too much about the parent who was. And those moments where my moral compass kicked in I think came from the fact that I had a mom who, you know, was a person who tried to teach us, right. And took care of her kids and gave us an example that we could look at of how you take responsibility for your family and do the right thing. And at the moment, I didn't see her as the source of much of anything, but I think that as I've gotten older, I can look back and say that like her sticking with me and being that example really mattered. And in ways that I still probably to this day don't fully understand. Yeah. Cause it's the environment that's been created, that positive environment. Yeah.

Jodi Abbott: So I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about the citizen empowerment project. Tell us what it is, what you hope to achieve through it and what you're doing with it.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah, so the CEP and nonprofit organization that I started at when I moved back to Toronto from law school, and what we wanted to do was give people access to educational opportunities so they could get some of the empowerment that I had experienced in law school. Right? So the best thing I got out of law school, and I think the best thing I'd have my education at large was a better understanding of how the world works. Right? So if you see a problem in your society, what are the different ways you might actually be able to change it? You know, where does decision making power exist, right? The city, the province, the federal government. What are things that the private sector can do? What are things that judges can do or members of parliament or, right. Like this is like division of responsibility in how our world is shaped is something that most people I don't think get a clear understanding of until they're later on in their life.

Jamil Jivani: Right. Which is why for instance, the voting patterns of young people, um, tend to be so different as compared to how the elder folks in our society. The younger you are, the less likely you are to vote, the less like you are to pay attention to a lot of the kind of formal party politics. Right? And so what we wanted to do is just create opportunities for people to learn about those things earlier on in their lives and then train them to have some of the skills they would need to actually go out and affect change. The first set of issues that we worked on were related to law enforcement and policing. And in particular, I'm over policing in, in low income and mostly minority neighborhoods in the Toronto area. And so what that meant was helping build programs that young people could come to where they could learn, well, if you want to change policing who has that power and what is the difference between changing law enforcement versus changing the law?

Jamil Jivani: And then training them with some of the advocacy skills they might need to go out and meet with a police officer or meet with a city counselor or a member of parliament and talk about what are the specific changes you're asking them to lead. And then when you go to the ballot box and you turn 18 how do you make an informed decision about what's going to change your community for the better from your particular perspective? It to me, the work we do is a balance of what I really believe in, which is to empower people on an individual level because that's who we are ultimately as citizens, but so that they understand how exercising their individuality affects their neighbor, their friend, their mom, their dad, their brother, their sister. And that is the balance that we've tried to, you know, articulate in our work that we're building individual leaders but who have compassion in a heart for the people they share their community with.

Jodi Abbott: Right? So I'm, I'm hearing individual skill development, but really how they will influence and build their society because as they garner those individual advocacy skills and I'm hearing, principals, and the ability to, to push right, because in advocacy you have to have an opinion not just an opinion. It should be backed up by some good facts because the evidence is important. But then it's, if each individual person can take these views forward and they're well grounded, you will influence community and you'll have more followers really, because you're going to go create a groundswell that will begin to change communities. Fair?

Jamil Jivani: Yeah, that's exactly right.

JC Wilson: Good. Well that was a good answer. Good answer. I wanted to sort of shape it a bit into discussion about on one of your podcast you talked about the easiness of people can generalize about culture and economic situation in class to make broad based concepts that are not necessarily tested by on the ground about still, you know, viable solutions. You know, we often talk about Toronto, I grew up, Keele & shepard myself, but on the bay side, so I know there was a difference. You crossed over Keele and there was a different community and it never should have been that way. There was, you know, these definitive lines, but everybody made generalizations and I never saw the whole time I lived there. I was only there for a number of, a couple of years, but I never saw a really good solutions. It was just them over there, this over there, all the different sort of circle community street and, and in some cases, immigrant communities within immigrant communities. And all of them sort of doing their own thing. But no one had frank discussions about how we can solve the problems that were happening there because it was too politically correct or it was too, you know, you sell censor those discussions. And I don't think they ever got until even some recently gotten to a place where they're starting to get solutions.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. I think there's a real gap between and I'd try to be careful not to use overly divisive language when I describe this, but I think there's a gap between what you might call, let's say like how cultural and social elites in our society, right? So, and I say that fully recognize that in some cases that includes me too, are people who have in an ordinate amount of institutional power who have influenced a decision making. Right? And then there's a gap between those folks in our society and a lot of the people who are on the ground experiencing the social issues that define that I think define our politics of the day. So when we're talking about class for instance I think it's really obvious to me at least that like class barely comes up in news media, right? It's just not something that people cover.

Jamil Jivani: Journalists don't seem attuned to talking about class issues very often, but what they are used to talking about is what you could get maybe called like identity politics. You're more likely to hear things about race or gender or sexuality than you are about the class divisions in our society. And I think that in large part is because that's how people who occupy these elite spaces, that's how they see themselves. These, at least spaces aren't very class diverse, but they are diverse in some of these other ways. And so it makes sense that that's how they see the world. Right? But what that means in practice is a lot of the challenges that are very acute on the ground, right? And when they stay on the ground, I mean in schools among young people in social challenges, social service providers face, challenges that grassroots activists and community organizers might encounter, are things that don't get attention from folks who control resources.

JC Wilson: Not being funded.

Jamil Jivani: Exactly. So, yeah, one of the biggest examples to me is family breakdown, right. There is not a single school that I go to and I've had the privilege over the last two months of speaking to probably 15,000 students across Canada. There's not a school I go to where I don't have young people who want to talk about what it's like to grow up in a broken

home because it's such a pervasive challenge and it looks different for different people, but the, the feeling a young person has when things aren't working right between your parents, that's, that on a gut level is very shared by a lot of them. Right. A lot of us.

JC Wilson: **And simply that's increasing.**

Jamil Jivani: Exactly. Yeah. And yet, like I would say the number of programs responding to that, the number of policy initiatives responding to that is not growing as that trend increases. Right. And I think that's because a lot of the folks who have that institutional power, they're not concerned about those issues. They don't see them. They're not exposed to them. It's just not part of their life. So that's what concerns me about those divisions, right? Both in terms of geography but also in terms of culture is that we're not seeing an adequate response to things that I think are very relevant to the folks that in theory we are all supposed to be concerned about. Right. Which is the children that are going to like lead our country in the future.

JC Wilson: **Can I ask you to look school sizes and things like that in Toronto and some of the communities in Toronto that mean kids are on a bus for an hour to go to school. When they could, if adequately funded, you know, build a school that would be closer. Or in your book, you talk about the charter school systems and those issues about how their, some places are all about them and some people are dead set against.**

Jodi Abbott: **Yeah. Well it's, it's interesting with what you say because when you think about challenges in a family, family break up, what we tend to do is we take the most extreme of the of the fallout. So we, we deal with family violence or we try to, right? We try to support people who are in that situation. We try to support on the child welfare side, but we don't actually ever talk about what's happening in the family and the challenge of a family and the breakup of a family. So what we're doing almost is while maybe not almost maybe we are doing, is we're trying to put the bandaid on the severe, very public, sometimes public, very noticeable piece. So there's a violence issue. So we're going to do something about that. But are we really going to the root of the problem and that, that that's a challenge.**

Jodi Abbott: **That's a challenge in how do we build strong societies? How do we build respect for individuals? How do we build, how do we create role models to get individuals to help in those situations? And it, it goes right back to how do we have those conversations? Because when you think about the family unit that's quite private, right? Like it's something that you don't really, you don't really go there because even, you know, even as a woman who's been married 36 years, my husband and I can have conversations, but I'm usually not going to bring those conversations to work on, you know, what's really going well or, or what's not going well because it's private. So it's an, it's an interesting piece on how do you almost wiggle your way in there to have the conversation so that you can actually understand the root to the problem rather than we'll give you a solution. Because I think part of our challenge in society, right? We want a solution for everything. One, because I think we're, there's a lot of smart people out there. People want to be seen as doing good and being able to say, I solved the problem. But it may be, it's leading to not enough of the right conversation to get us there.**

JC Wilson: I know discussions we've had before about good public policy. You know, there's, there's people feeling the need to do something to be seen or perceived as taking action balanced against is that really good public policy? And I know like in Toronto, that's a constant problem. My folks live in Ontario. It's a constant problem. That argument between good public policy and being seen or perceived to be taking action.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. And that's, I mean that that is a defining challenge of politics generally, I think. Right, Is when you're in the business of being given a job, mostly on perception, it's, I think sometimes it demands political leaders to want more from themselves, even if that's not what the political environments asking them for. Right? That means sometimes you have to make tough decisions that might not be super popular at the time, but that's because you have a vision for something that's going to be good for the society that you're given the privilege of helping lead. Right. And I think that kind of political courage is lacking too often these days. And it would be nice to see more of it.

JC Wilson: Yeah, I think in a lot of ways that's the biggest challenge of our day to day is public policy. There's lots of policy initiatives and you're seeing such a bipolar relationship in the states, which as you note again in your book that that no matter what we do leaks up through culture, art, music, leaks into Canada, that we get the same sort of bipolar approach to politics when really most people are probably in the middle and then that middle ground. But we're hearing the more vocal sort of fringe elements or making the vocal arguments on social media. We're really the ground truth. Most people aren't as bad as describing the generations aren't as bad and they're actually real out of really, really good people. And, and I think sometimes we miss that when we're trying to deal with really complex problems because we can't even get to the discussion point cause we've already taken a side and you're removable on your side. So there's no way we can have those discussions.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah, I think we live in a time where actually one of the defining characteristics of good leadership is just having enough of a backbone that when the fringes are loud and they come for you and they come for you with vitriol, you're able to take that right and just keep doing what you think is right. And I wish we didn't live in a time where that perhaps have such a low bar was, was expected of us. But I think that's the case right now that having a backbone in standing behind what you believe goes a long way.

JC Wilson: I've really noticed that. Like we did a podcast on social media and I wasn't really into Twitter and I said okay, I'm going to give it a go. And I find it really, really hard to sort of follow on Twitter because I find it the vitriol and the hate and the anger, there's some good stuff in there. Don't get me wrong, there's a good belt of information in there, but there are so many people are just, that's what they do. And they just posting and posting and posting mean and just, yeah. And just throwing stuff out. And the fact that they're anonymous doesn't help either.

Jamil Jivani: What's what a recent pattern that's really bothered me is seeing young authors. So sometimes in their late teens, early twenties, who write young adult fiction for the most part in there in the last couple of months, there's been two examples of high profile young authors who are going to release a highly anticipated debut novel cancel their book release because they were convinced by a Twitter mob that they were too

insensitive to a certain political issue. And it's really heartbreaking to see. And it makes me think that a big part of the training that young leaders, especially those who are going to be more public as artists, as business people, whatever it might be need to be trained on how to handle that criticism. Because when you're the subject of that, what you're talking about on Twitter, it can rock you and you feel alone because the probably majority of people who are on Twitter who don't have those negative things to say about you, they're not commenting, you know, with the same enthusiasm, right? To remind you that you're actually a good person and you're doing something well. And so it feels like you're by yourself. And so isolating and seeing those examples of bright, young people kind of cave to that, it really bugs me. And I hope that those of us who are in the, you know, who are trying to build strong young leaders start to become more aware of myself included of how we could help people prepare for those challenges. I think part of that is preparing young people for failure, preparing them for criticism.

Jodi Abbott: Because if you're going to be a leader in society, you will have criticism. And actually we need leaders who can take the criticism. And as you said, stick to their values, stick to the plan. And I think where we have very polarizing issues and it seems more and more people will grab the extreme, and I don't know if it's because people are lost or that they just need to have something really strong to hang on to, whether it's good strong, or bad strong. And so if you're a leader and you have to have a good backbone, yes, but how do you also gather that middle ground so that you can find something that is, and it goes back to the common ground, something that might bring this extreme view and this extreme view. There are some people you just will never get to the middle. That won't happen. But how do we create more harmony? You know, we have to have a leader that's going to push through because you have to, you have to have values, principles. Here's where I'm going. This is where I'm going to go. And particularly political leaders because we need them to have vision and to take us on a journey that will be good for all of us in society, but we also need to know how do we, how do we draw that common ground? How do we actually get back to, you know, I would say good humanity and respecting people's thoughts and opinions and values to get there.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. Well I think one of that's one of the great things about podcasting to me is that it's opened up a lane for kind of long form detailed conversation and it shows that, you know, when you're having a cable news style conversation where you've got eight minutes to say, you know, how, why the other person's completely wrong. And then they have time to tell them, explain why you're, it creates a certain kind of environment for public discourse that is inevitably just about the conflict. And that's actually where you seek your validation is how many people you're fighting with. Right? But these long form conversations that podcasts create, right. And my favorite podcast, I'll do a really good job at this is it gives you the space to fully say what you think and fully explore subject. And by the end of it, you realize that you, when you, when you give people the time that you will spotlight all the things that you have in common, it makes it so much easier to see that like, yeah, on the edges there might be certain things we disagree on, but we have a similar goal, right. In terms of where we'd like the world to be. We'd like the similar things for everybody. And you know, knowing that creates, I think a basis for dialogue and collaboration that's a lot easier.

JC Wilson: I wanted to ask you a couple of questions on, in your book again. You know, I'm quoting your book, but I think everybody should read. I really enjoyed, it's a good, easy read. It's got great information and it's, you know, it's research to start just a fiction novel. It's got numbers in there. But what I thought was interesting from an education point of view was the reverse gender gap in education. And I thought that was something we should discuss because it's interesting enough, and correct me if I'm wrong its 60% women at NorQuest college and in some of the, the medical fields, it's even greater than that. It's like 80% of the women in some of the medical fields. And when we talk about the reverse education gap, that there's this gap of, of men, young men doing education.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. You know, when we talk about gender gaps or that's the traditional way we talk about it in terms of women being underrepresented or the reverse gender gap, I always like to remind people that I don't think there needs to be some sort of like perfect quota, right? Again, not every program should be 50/50, because people have their own individual interests. Right. To me where the reverse gender gap is gap is relevant is just to show that the traditional institutions that we might have historically relied on for men to be encouraged to be provided role models to be prepared for the future. They might not have the same resonance with men today that they used to have. Right? So if we know that fewer men are going to college and university than let's say in the past, where are those men going? Like that's to me the interesting question and where are they getting their inspiration and they're role models, their instruction from if they're disengaged from school.

Jamil Jivani: And so that's to me where the interesting point is, I never liked to argue that you know, I'd like, you know, more men should be going to university. I know that. Here's an example. I didn't think you intended that. I just want to make sure that, that, that, uh, that I clarify that because sometimes that's how people hear it and but that what I find, I guess most important to recognize from those statistics is just I think too often we have a cultural default where we assume that men feel empowered and feel like they have access to opportunity. And I think that that's not the case. And I don't know when that might've shifted or if it was ever true. But I do think it's really important to underscore that a lot of men need to be encouraged, right? A lot of boys need to be told, you know, you can do these things, you are good enough, you are capable. And to whatever extent are reverse gender gap is a reflection of maybe too many boys not thinking they can do those things as opposed to choosing not to. That's where, what I'm concerned about and I do worry about that a lot. That even now, even our prime minister, he uses language often that I think would lead you to think that boys are this kind of uniformly privileged and empowered, you know, 50% of our population roughly So. And that's just not true. There are a lot of boys that are struggling, right? And there are boys that do really well and are, you know, granted a lot of opportunity and support, but there are plenty and these are the boys I probably disproportionately interact with a lot of boys that are struggling and don't believe in themselves and are, you know, depressed and think they have a bleak future ahead of them. And so the reverse gender gap is I think a reminder that we should never over-simplify those things. Right.

JC Wilson: That it shouldn't be generalize exactly. It's a complex issue.

Jamil Jivani: Exactly. Yeah.

Jodi Abbott: The other piece in your book is you talked a lot about how often as you were growing up, you felt minimized. So as you, as you went through the challenges of life, did a big turnaround really. Going to Yale law school is a really, really big deal and you should be very proud of that. How did that experience of feeling minimized? How did you catalyze that and turn that around in, in the other way? So that, and maybe it wasn't a catalyst for you. But I always look at it as I was in a situation where I was told in high school that I would not go to college. I would not go to university because I wasn't smart enough. And for me that was actually a catalyzing moment because I had a very strong mother who said, you can do whatever you want and you know, I have a PhD. I went through all of that process. Was it easy? No, because I wasn't, you know, a strong academic student, so I had to work really hard for it, but that, those very words of that, you know, very inappropriate counselor became a catalyst for me. So did your experience of being minimized, did that ever turn into a catalyst for you?

Jamil Jivani: It did. I think a lot of the reason I felt that way is because of where I was seeking like respect and admiration. So I didn't feel like I was getting it at home. Right. I didn't feel like I was getting it at school because I didn't fit in. I didn't do what the teachers wanted me to do. So I didn't feel like I was being valued when I would go to school every day. And so I sought it from a peer group that encouraged me to do things that probably weren't good for me or for them. Right. And where I started to get that respect and admiration from people who actually had good intentions in my life, people who wanted me to do well. That's where my transformation started to begin. Right. When I remember very vividly the day I got my first B plus on something and it was in college and the day just sticks with me because it was the first time I felt like I had done something that deserved praise in an academic environment and it's, and it became just as, it was so normal for me to get, you know, D's and C's and F's, you know, in high school. When I got that B plus, it created a feeling I wanted to chase because I started to feel like, okay, I feel good. People are saying something good about me. People think highly of me. I want more of that. I like being treated with that kind of respect. I liked being admired in that way. So the minimization I think came from thinking I couldn't get that feeling, um, from the adults in my life. And once I had adults who figured out how to communicate with me effectively enough where I trusted that if I wanted to, their admiration, I could get it if I wanted their respect. It was possible. I just had to do my part. Once I had those people in my life, that's it just create a whole new way of thinking about the world.

Jodi Abbott: So it's interesting, in the college one of our values is our value of people and one of the, I guess sub values. And for me the most important value is in respect. And I have a conversation with new employees. Every time I do new employee orientation, I talk about the value of respect and I, you'll hear the saying that respect is earned. I've a very different point of view on that. I believe respect is a basic human quality and everyone deserves respect. Now you can take the extreme of that, that somebody's murdered, okay, you can take the extreme of that. But part of what I'm hearing you say is you got the B plus with that became admiration and respect. So if we started from it with our employees saying, we respect you, we respect everything you can bring to the table, you're starting here instead of at the bottom and trying to build up. And so I look at it as if we start with the view that I'm going to respect you and you are going to

respect me. What I am hopeful of is that that's going to lead to even more respect and you're going to be more motivated to achieve for our organization because we are changing lives and strengthening communities and I see it as something can we not start in this good place versus having to earn it. And I particularly think that as a child because as a child you, you want to be noticed, you want to be admired you, you want to be, have the pat on the back on the back. And so I always put it out there to say, can we start here? Cause I think it's a great place to start

JC Wilson: Which is always fun on our conversations. You know, you could drive direct parallel change from those words and we talking about the armed forces.

Jamil Jivani: Well I was going to ask you that respect must have a very particular meaning.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And, well, we've been really working in the armed forces to try to do the same sort of idea that everybody's a member of the team and everybody's a valued member and you know, and once in a while we'll have an incident where we have to sit back and question that and look at it and say, okay, clearly we're not talking about our culture, talking about what's important and what the value is. And what I've always been struck by the armed forces is that throughout my time I can tell you stories of people who have very difficult lives and background and with the great thing about the armed forces is you a very detailed and structured family and for some people's structure and in that environment and respect and all that is something that's organic to our organization.

JC Wilson: And I think very much in NorQuest college too, it's just, it's the same ideal and that, and I really think that for some young people, postsecondary education, armed forces service, national service is one of those things that gives you that purpose. Cause I'm a firm believer that purpose is probably one of the most important things in our lives. In your book you describe in different ways, and I know Jodi when you all described it, but at the end of the day to drill it down to if you have purpose and you have definition of what you wanted to do. I knew from a very young age I wanted to be in the armed forces and that was it and I my son who's climbing ice climbing in a mountain someplace, looking for his purpose. If I didn't have that purpose, I right now, I could not tell you what path I would've taken, where I would've gone because that was once I figured it out, it was, it was all encompassing. I was able to succeed. I wasn't a great student. I don't enable to do it, but when I got my, everything came and I sense from your story it was the same thing when you had found your purpose sort of everything came together.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah. Yeah. I think that's exactly right. When you start to feel there's something very important. I think to feeling useful too. Right? And that's where the purpose comes in. It's like you start to feel like, okay, like I'm, I'm what I'm doing means something to somebody. And that feeling, you know, when you chase it, it can take you to really special places.

JC Wilson: Yeah, that's the respect Jodi was talking about that. Did you ever respected member of the team? And your purpose is to, in this case, to educate and assist people in those, those growth as an individual grows. You know, I think that's what's amazing about

NorQuest colleges. You see all these people and they're all here to improve their lives and move along. And I just think that's a fantastic component of the school, armed forces, what you're doing. And we're all sort of on the same sheet of music, which is really cool.

Jodi Abbott: So Jamil, I think we're getting to the end of our podcast time and I would just ask if there's one key message that you would like the listeners to take from you, what would it be

JC Wilson: buy your book?

Jamil Jivani: Sure. Sorry. That's a good one. Yeah, man buy the book. But I guess in addition to buy the book one of the reasons I like to start a lot of my conversations recognizing kind of who I was as a teenager and where I kind of came from is because I hope it reminds people of the importance of redemption, right? That sometimes we meet people or find people at certain periods of their life and they're just not the best version of themselves, but especially the young people in our society have so much time and potential to turn that around. And if anyone, whoever thinks something highly of me remembers that they should also remember that, you know, there was a time not too long ago where you wouldn't have seen any of those good qualities in me and where I was buried in a school system and in a family situation where no one knew what I was capable of or what I could learn or any of the talents and abilities that I had. So I think there's a lot of young people like that. And I hope that we keep our minds open to the redemption stories that they're going to be able to tell as well.

Jodi Abbott: So everyone has potential and there are possibilities.

Jamil Jivani: Yeah.

JC Wilson: And again, I'd really like to thank you for coming out in the book. You know, and I'll give you a good plug on that. I, I'm not, there's a bit of a joke here cause like normally I don't come really super prepared for these. I normally have some thoughts. But I really got immersed in your book and it's one of the few books I've read. Finished it and then went back and started again cause I felt I hadn't gotten the full depth and flavor of the information that you provided in there. Plus being on a treadmill Kinda, you know, your mind wanders a bit, but an exceptional book and really well done. And I commend you for that and also really enjoy your podcast. And I think, again, I'd like to plug your podcast, The Road Home, is the people should listen to it because the style and the people, it's just so frank and I think that' what I liked about it. Young people talking about their mental health experiences you know, its own indigenous, leader talking about how he turned his life around that redemption moment, especially the one in the community safety one, which I think is a must listen to, uh, how they turn a community around where no one could figure out what, how to solve the problem in the Winnipeg area and you know, with the Indigenous community and that that podcast really articulates or a really frank discussion about stuff, which I think in a lot of days today in politics and lot of things, we're just, we're just not having these discussions. We're just glossing over the media issues and not solving things. So thank you for this. I think you've done a great service by writing this book.

Jamil Jivani: Appreciate that. And thank you for having me here in NorQuest.

Jodi Abbott: Thank you so much.

Closing: You've been listening to leadership and challenging times with Dr Jodi Abbott and Lieutenant Colonel JC Wilson on the NorQuest college podcast. Any questions or suggestions on any episodes can be directed to us at podcast at NorQuest dot. Ca If you enjoy today's podcast, please remember to subscribe using iTunes or Google play and get updated when the new episodes become available. Thanks for listening.