

# Competition in Higher Education

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

exams, people, friends, terms, students, feel, experiences, competitiveness, competition, guess, adult learner, higher education, helped, medical school, studying, mentioned, thorn, talking, important, campus

## SPEAKERS

Dannie, Chevaughn, Jay

### [Intro]

**Dannie** 00:05

Hi, everyone, and welcome back to another episode of Speak On It. I'm Dannie, your co-host, and I'll let our other people introduce themselves.

**Jay** 00:14

Hi, everyone, my name is Jay. I'm also a co-host today. I think in the past, we've introduced our hobbies. So I guess I'll share. I'm really into tennis, except it's one of those sports where you need a partner that's kind of at your level. So I've been playing a lot of wall ball recently. So if anyone's in Houston and wants to play, reach out.

**Chevaughn** 00:38

Hello, everyone, my name is Chevaughn. My hobby would be singing. I'm not the best singer in the world, but I really enjoy music, so that would be one of my big hobbies.

**Dannie** 00:55

Today we're going to be talking about competition in higher education. So the first question is, what are the different factors that lead to a competitive educational environment? What factors have the greatest impact on you? So kind of like what makes it so competitive? Are there anything that kind of sticks out in your memory as being like, "Okay, this was a very, like heated moment," or things people can kind of be prepared for.

**Jay** 01:28

I think for me, it's like a lot of the rhetoric that I had cuz I'm pre-med, I've been pre-med for like the past, I don't know how many years I don't want to share. But um, it's been a minute, and I think like a lot of the conversations regarding not only like the medical field, but some like graduate and PhD programs, is kind of the rigor and if you don't necessarily get that like 4.0 and the like, perfect percentage or top 90 percentile, on these graduate entrance exams, then you have no right you have no, you have no business to apply to medical school or graduate school or whatever it is, right? Because there's a perception that like, you know what, if you get a B in this class, it's not even worth-- it give up. And I think that kind of brings into that-- it just brings like a negative mentality into coursework because then it

starts nagging at you. And from my personal experience: I started going into this mentality of memorization as opposed to actual learning and processing material that's given to me. And I think that's kind of, and please correct me or like, add on to this if y'all disagree, but I feel like that's kind of the issue with our current, competitive system, unfortunately, or the way that students kind of process competition. They really just regurgitate information. As opposed to sometimes really learning and being able to properly apply it, and that's because of the grade stamp or the need to be able to maintain that grade.

**Chevaughn 03:13**

I would absolutely agree with you on the regurgitation. I see it. I've seen it while I've been in medical school; I felt that way in undergrad as well. I think the biggest issue I'm seeing is just that heavy weight of examinations. And that goes on. And that ties in with the whole concept of grades because you're like, "Okay, I have this one chance," or a couple chances. There's some courses where you might only have two exams, while all other courses might have four or five throughout that semester. And so when you have four or five, you kind of have a little bit more opportunity to improve. But when it's a one or two exams, you know, the weight is definitely even heavier. And so you might find yourself just like, "Okay, if I just memorize all this information and just put it back on that exam, then I'll do well." But I think it's because education, in a lot of ways, feels like it's become more about impressing rather than learning. And it's unfortunate because I think most of us who go to school, especially once you start to get more and more into higher education, you want to get something out of it, you want to have a great learning experience. And I think that is something that you should try as best as you can to hold on to. So if that means you try to minor in something that you find really interesting or get involved with different organizations on campus that allow you to explore your other interests. So that you feel like your college experience or grad school experience is more meaningful, because in a lot of ways, exams and grades do become important. And it's something that if you aren't mindful of you might find yourself just not even enjoying the experience at all.

**Jay 04:54**

On top of that, like there's, there's also like a huge culture of like, I don't know if it's like self-hatred, but it's like over critical-- being over critical of not only yourself, but of your peers and kind of putting everyone on these like high pedestals and as a result of which, if you don't live up to like, whatever expectations that you have, like you start going into the cycle of like self-worth, self-evaluation, and for me personally, like I've had a long history and issue equating my self-worth with my academic performance due to various reasons. And I think with the competition in higher ed, that kind of-- it just perpetuated the system unfortunately, and it took a really long time for me to unlearn it, and I'm still in the process of unlearning it, but I think like what Chevaughn was mentioning in terms of "excuse me sir" say my cat has walked across the table there's also importance of trying to find passions and other outlets to kind of subset any negative emotions that you feel.

**Dannie 06:16**

Oh, would you mind elaborating more on passions and other outlets? So like how does this apply to you? Or what are some of your passions and outlets?

**Jay** 06:31

I am also a singer and I like I'm hesitant to say this because low key Dannie is very into us recording like an intro on song to our podcast and I don't know if I'm ready to make my debut. But like in high school, this this, this hits deep. Okay, we're going in to it. I'm ready. Um, so the other-- I think like last year, my cousin and I were talking and it got to like a deep conversation where at one point she like looked at me, and she was like, "Are you happy?" Because she was like, kind of like, "In high school and middle school you were such like a happy kid, like you would find joy in terms of like learning and all this other stuff. But like, now that you're older, like, early, like later in your 20s, like, you seem to be kind of miserable, not like miserable, but like, you don't seem to be the same person." And that question kind of hit deep because I was like, "I don't know. Am I happy?" Like I do find joy, like, day-to-day or I try to and find gratitude. But there are instances where I'm like, overall am I content with my life right now? And and kind of like processing like why that is, and I'm not pointing fingers or anything. I just think one of the reasons why I'm kind of slowly building myself up after being burnt out is because of the competition in higher education because I was-- partly because of my personality, but also partly because I was like, I need to have this on my resume and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, and kind of took away from experiences, and it also kind of just took a lot of energy and effort and it just strained me, day-to-day.

**Chevaughn** 08:22

When I was in college, one of the things I personally enjoyed was being a member of our gospel choir. And so we got to do performances on campus. We got to travel. I wish I had traveled with them more but that was one of the experiences that I found really helpful in terms of outlets for me. I spent a lot of time going to my friend's dorms and spending less time in my dorm, and we'd have, like, a dorm gathering. There we go. gathering. And just like come together as family and have a good time. One of my friends would always love to cook so she would cook for the whole group and we'd do stuff like that, and those are the memories of college that made it most meaningful, honestly. Like, because otherwise you think about just like that like, you know, what Jay is talking about, like the competitiveness, especially-- again, I was also pre-med. I was pre-med and in an honors program. So there were just several layers of competitiveness in terms of having to do a thesis and, you know, being one of the few people of color in certain classes, you know, you get looks you get, you know, people just kind of disregard you and dismiss you. And so you kind of had to like, find those outlets that allowed you to feel at home, feel like you belong. I was involved in the cultural groups on campus as well, and went to their events. And just as much as I could go to social events, I tried to do that. That really helped a lot.

**Dannie** 09:56

I love that. Thank you guys so much for sharing. I think it's important to remind people to continue to do what makes them happy. Because I think over time, like being able to perform really well in exams or to strive to accomplish a lot, like they might get a lot of praise for that and think, "This is what's going to pay off and make me happy." And maybe yes, in a way, but in another-- in a similar vein, I think there's almost too much emphasis put on that. And then we kind of forget about everything else that's important in life. So I think priorities are a big part of yeah, just like maintaining one's mental health because you don't have enough energy to attend to like every single thing you may want to in a day, but you have enough energy to like maybe attend to the really important things that are gonna like pay off

and like love you back, I think, because I don't know if tests really love you back and after you do really well and then it's like, "Okay! and next exam," or something, I don't know, but your friends, they will be with you for a long time, hopefully. And the things that you learned that like meant a lot to you, you'll probably remember for a long time, so yeah, super inspirational. And then to kind of go back to the negative side one more time. Well, we're obviously in a pandemic right now. So my question is, has this like affected I guess your, I guess, process in medical school? Or do you have any advice for people dealing with COVID-19 right now, or just what has it been like, just anything you're willing to share?

**Chevaughn 11:20**

So I've heading towards the end of my third year of medical school, which is the clinical year when you're rotating at different hospitals, and I was taken out of that setting, and we had to quickly start using Zoom as our main way of learning. We have to take-- so for every clinical rotation during your third year, you take what's called a shelf exam. And so, normally, you take that at your school. I personally-- this is just like a side thing. If you are someone who does feel like you need extra time on exams, or need to take your exams in different spaces, I definitely advocate for that. It's helpful if you have a therapist or someone who is involved in your care who can sign a paper. And so I actually started doing that during my third year; I wish I had done it sooner. But that helped me while I was still taking on-campus exams to just have my own space and clear my mind, and that's something/that was something I needed for my personal mental health. But during COVID, we had to take them like at home, but I still got to have my extended time which was really helpful. During the exam, unfortunately, the power went out, but came back on and it worked out, ultimately. But in terms of competitiveness, so I want to go into psychiatry, and it's not traditionally one of the more competitive fields in medicine, but it is becoming more and more competitive. Basically, more and more people are interested in going into it. And when it comes to medical school, a lot of times, not always, it can be about numbers. So we have like our board exams that people have been studying for. And unfortunately, because of COVID, they've had cancellations with those exams. So it's like you-- say you spent a four week block studying for an exam, then you find out it's canceled. You don't know when you're going to take it again, but you kind of don't want to stop studying because you know, if you stopped studying, then you might lose some of that stuff that you have in your head. So you kind of have to just keep studying. And it's been a lot of stress on people, especially because it's not just COVID going on, but all the racism and structural racism, racial violence, so many different things that people are experiencing at once and then still trying to study or still trying to do whatever they need to do to set themselves up to be successful during this residency application cycle. It's been hard because you know, we don't really get to do away rotations as much and what those are, is say-- so I'm in medical school in Connecticut. Say I'm really interested in going to Florida. So I do like a clinical rotation at a medical facility in Florida, let them get to know who I am. And then that, you know, if it goes well, ideally, you may have a better chance of getting an interview at that place. So we've lost that. They basically said, don't really do aways, unless it's like within our school. They're saying within four hours of the campus, and so if I wanted to apply really far away, I'm gonna have to navigate that a little bit differently now. And so then you do feel that pressure even more to do well on those exams, that I talked about the board exams because you're like, "Okay, if I can get a high score on that, and do get involved in as much things as--" you feel that pressure to be the perfect applicant, and you felt that before COVID-19. But now even moreso.

**Jay** 14:47

One of my best friends-- like she I think she's also a third year-- and she was mentioning that her school got rid of away rotations as well and she said that was a huge issue with her residency applications. Because she was like, "The specialties that I want to get into, that's where away rotations, I can get my letters of rec. And now I'm kind of like, I don't know who to ask." Um, so I guess that may be like another difficulty for y'all. (Chevaughn: Absolutely.) I wanted to piggyback on what Chevaughn was saying in terms of students also dealing with what's happening with COVID. But on top of that, with everything that's happening with like, institutional racism and the protests and the social changes that need to be happening that are slowly but surely happening. But that also takes a huge toll on a lot of students, especially our black students. **And one thing that I've talked to like that same best friend was-- she has had a couple of friends who have had to take their boards this past month or so. And because of that, they had to completely compartmentalize everything that was happening. They had to like shut it down. They were like, "I need to put it in a box. I don't have time to process this."** And this may just be me being naive with the overall system, but personally, in terms of like mental health, I don't know how good compartmentalizing is because I feel like some-- like with the way that like competition exists in higher education, like I think, again, I may be wrong about this, but I feel like there's kind of like pressures to compartmentalize and to kind of be like, oh, like, "Be resilient," and like, "Deal with it. Push through." And then afterwards, that's when you can process your emotions and feelings. But I don't know-- what are y'all's thoughts?

**Chevaughn** 16:50

I would agree with you. I think that that is part of the issue. I can attest to that. I've been that student that's also had to compartmentalize because I'm studying for an exam as well, and I'm studying for a board exam after this, so I've had to like, basically, limit my social media use, for example. And, like really try to tune out news as much as possible. But it's at the same time, I haven't really had time to process all that I'm feeling relating to this. And I know that there's so many other students who feel the same way. And a lot of students have been spending their energy teaching the schools because the higher education system hasn't been supporting students in this way. And with everything that's been going on, you're finding students saying, "Okay, hey, this is how you can support students of color, especially now." So there's an organization, for instance, called White Coats for Black Lives. That's a national organization and we have chapters throughout the country and a few weeks ago, different chapters sent, I don't want to say demands, but that was kind of the term that was used. But it's basically recommendations for the schools to say, "Hey, this is-- these are ways you can support your students of color. These are ways you can actively work on being anti-racist. And you know, like focusing on curriculum, whatever it may be, there were different aspects of it. But I feel as much as that was great, I was like, I think about some of my friends who have been spending so much energy doing that, but not doing their work. **And so again, when you're in a competitive environment, and you're expected to perform the same way as everybody else, and you're a student of color, who's dealing with complex trauma, it's like, it's so challenging.** And I really hope that all of those things are taken into consideration in the next year when it comes to residency applications. When it comes to people who are on the, what they call the wards right now or people who are in undergrad and they're about to go back to campus to finish their senior year or starting their freshman year, and they're dealing with all this trauma and all these different things that are going on in their head and they haven't had time

process it for various reasons. That's the thing I'm worried about as a budding psychiatrist. The aftermath is what I'm worried about as well.

**Jay 19:16**

I really love how you mentioned that because like, I think at the start of like Corona, I think the Steve Fund has reached out to the like YAB and campuses in terms of like, what exactly are students like dealing with? Like in their home environments or everything and I think there were some conversations from student testimonies on social media where some professors were not-- they just weren't very empathetic with the current situations, and they were basically like, "We still expect you to perform up to par." And I think that that also ties into the whole competition environment where the professors as maybe like a latent function of their responsibilities may add that extra pressure on the students where it's like "You may be going through some stuff, but we still expect you to be able to do X, Y, and Z." And I think like for some students, that works as a motivator, because they're like, "Yes, this is an issue. I want to be able to fix it. I want to be able to come out on top." And I think that's great because like, I've met a couple people that are able to thrive and be able to utilize that as momentum to be able to push to their goals. But then I've also met other people, like for me personally, where like, I get affected by it, and I'm just like, "I can't."

**Dannie 20:41**

Yeah, I think one quote I saw that was really interesting was like "Gen Z is like the most anxious generation but also the most fearless," because-- and also millennials. I think this applies to everyone. Like we've been doing so much so much work and putting so much time and energy into teaching the institutions that are supposed to be teaching us and like, protesting and all this other work that needs to be done. I just have a lot of admiration and respect for all the young people who are working to change the world. So they're doing that on top of all their other responsibilities. And I just hope they know how appreciated they are. Because it's just so important. And it's something that's gonna I think, at the end of the day end up being like one of the most important things.

**Jay 21:42**

Looking back in terms of like other 11 episodes preceding this, like a lot of things that we mentioned like what success expectations, life goals, chosen family are all things that I personally feel like have helped me in terms of competition. Defining "What does success look like for me?" Defining my expectations, coming to terms of like life goals and what that means, like, it doesn't have to be linear. It doesn't have to be bam, bam, bam. I can pursue other passions... And being kind to yourself, which I think is a whole different conversation and podcast panel conversation that we can have in terms of like, what does it mean to like, truly be self-loving and self-compassionate? Because I think it's so important, especially right now. But then also the chosen family, like Chevaughn also mentioned her like, going over to a friend's place and having a good time socializing. That has definitely helped me because knowing that there are other people that may be going through similar things that I am, and we were nurturing each other, and not necessarily pushing each other. Because that's also an important aspect in terms of social groups. It's okay to be competitive and shoot, like I'm competitive with some of my friends, too. But there's also like a, there's like a specific way that it should happen, if that makes sense. Because I've been in competitions with people where they don't push you very well, like they don't push you

positively. Right? They kind of shame you in terms of like, how well you're doing. And they're like, "Oh, like you did that? Hm. I got like, three points higher than you." Like I feel like that brings in like a very bad perspective, because then like, instead of like a friend in a friendly competition, it's more of like a, "Oh, you're kind of like a frenemy, now." And so we have to like we're at odds. But Dannie, you're like a runner. Like is like a thing with like athletes sort of?

**dannie** 23:58

Definitely I talked about I was just saying yeah, this this morning actually with my brother. I was like, "Do I have an academic example? But honestly, not really, because I didn't talk to people about homework. For some reason I kind of just did my own thing. And I like doing my work at home. Like I know some people would be doing stuff at lunch and in the library and talking about it, and like sharing answers and everything. And I probably just did most of it by myself in high school because it was more manageable. I know, the workload gets a lot heavier when you get to higher education. So I don't know if I have anything to say there. But in running, I definitely can say that there is just such a difference between when I was running with just like someone who you could tell wouldn't mind if you beat them, and they weren't going to take it like so personally, like the end of the world. And then someone who's just like, "They can't beat me because I hate them." And I don't know it was just-- and I definitely felt that and there was-- there's this one story, and I think I was probably like a sophomore. And there's a senior who I ended up running against, "against," not even! It was like a practice workout thing. And we were running back to the school, kind of like the final, like 400 meters or whatever. And I think I was running and I think she came out of nowhere and like, was trying to pass me and I was just I just, like, picked up the pace because I was like, "Okay, this is a good challenge. Like, I like to finish strong," and she really wanted to beat me because she just was like, I could just feel her breathing so heavily. I was like, "Okay, I didn't know it was that serious." So then we get back to the school. And she's like, "Yeah, you didn't have to do that. I just wanted to run with you." And I was like, "No, you didn't. You wanted to beat me. Definitely. For sure. And she wanted to make me feel bad about it. And she wanted to make me feel bad about pushing myself, and I guess she just didn't like the fact that I ended up winning that particular time. But I think in a healthier competitive relationship, it's okay if your friend maybe is gonna get a higher score one day. You might get a higher score another day. That's just life. And so when you're able to have that-- I think that's when you have those people that you know, you can surround yourself with. They want to see you do well.

**Jay** 26:00

**They need to be a competitor but also a cheerleader.** At least in my perspective.

**Dannie** 26:05

Oh, yes. Yes. Like the combination. Because it's definitely possible to be a competitor and cheerleader. And to be a good competitor. So even if they're on another team, they can still shake your hand at the end, or they can just have a-- I mean, be polite about it. **Like when the game kind of turns sour is when the rivalry kind of takes over, the competition aspect takes over, there can only be one winner. But I think we want multiple winners, we need multiple doctors, we need people in these different areas.** We don't need like one winner in every single-- actually, I think that's like also another thing that contributes to pressure on medical students and people in grad school is just like, like, even though we have a

shortage of doctors, they also try to make it like they kind of, I don't know, I don't know if they try to make it hard for people to become doctors, or it just seems like they are, because it's kind of like picking people off every year.

**Jay** 27:05

It also kind of ties into the Oppressive Olympics. I don't know if anyone's familiar with that term. It's usually for like, Black, Indigenous, People of Color and how there are certain spots and locations like within society and that there are finite positions for BIPOC. And we all have to compete with one another. And it starts getting into this like, ugly thing where it's like, "Oh, like I had to deal with like X, Y and Z circumstances versus you" and dah, dah, dah, dah and kind of like comparing that, and I'm not trying to invalidate experiences because like as an Asian American there experiences that I can only imagine and read about for like certain Black, Indigenous, and Latinx populations that I can, I probably will never experience. But it's that I think that to tie that back into the competition aspect of it I think that's the mentality that like there are finite spaces, and in a way there are finite spaces. But the way that we go about it can also determine how we can motivate and pull each other up as opposed to push each aside, if that makes sense. Not to get to lecture-y

**Chevaughn** 28:36

No, that's not a lecture at all. I think that's like one of the things that I wanted to see, especially as you you know, again, move higher and higher in education. Unless you're at a predominantly Black institution or other institution that's serving a lot of students that are of color, you're likely going to be in the minority. And so I think, if more of us who have been through these different experiences actually come together and support one another and lift one another up, like, that's the best case scenario that I'd love to see. Because like you're saying, I think you start to compare yourself to everyone else. The people that look like you that are actually meant to be your friends, are meant to be your peers, your colleagues, the people that actually support you as like, "Oh my goodness, I have to do better than that person in order to get to where I need to be. Because otherwise I'm not going to be perceived as good as someone else." And it gets very toxic very quickly. So like, even when it comes to your friends, I think, one of the things that someone told me a long time ago, it's always great to have people in your circle who are smarter-- who have something that you don't. So if that means you have a friend that's smarter than you, you have a friend that you know, maybe you're the one that's the better supporter, maybe the other friend is better at, I don't know, bringing everyone together. Everyone has their gift that they bring to that friend group, or that circle of people, and you just maximize on everyone's skill set or everyone's gift that they have. You give to one another, you receive from the other person. **I feel like that's at least one way to try to combat competitiveness, is appreciating what someone has that you don't have, and being around people who will appreciate what you have that they don't.**

**Jay** 30:26

There's another quote that I remember someone like, I don't know if you actually said this to me, but like, there are times where like, you don't want to be the smartest person in the room, like ever. Because that means that there's no growth, there's no experiences for you to be able to learn from, like what you were mentioning. So yes. And then I think like to add on to what has helped me, is like mentors. Mentors that have either through similar experiences or have had friends go through external

experiences have been so helpful. One of my cousins went through law school and she also had feelings of anxiety and panic attacks. And one of the things she's really been helpful with in terms of my journey, retaking the MCAT and doing postback programs are just like, she's like, "Just be kind to yourself," like, you know, like "You're doing the best you can. And that's all you can expect. That's all anyone can expect from you, right? Given your circumstances, that's all you can do." And kind of like having that be played over and over. And I think Dr. Beal mentioned this, too, where "as long as you can say that you gave your all into it, then no one else can take that away from them," right? Because then you're like, I did the best that I could I got my results. They may or may not be good compared to others, but at least you're like "Yes, those are my results. And if I need to and if I want to, I can build upon that foundation."

**Dannie** 32:06

I think that requires a certain level of security because I know I'm not going to name the school but this may actually be popular at multiple schools, but it's something called misery poker. Basically just like seeing who has the most miserable, overloaded week out of like everyone playing. And that's kind of like, "At least I have that. Like, I may be miserable. But at least I won this game." And that's sometimes I think what higher education can feel like, but I kind of like what you guys brought up as an alternative to that. Like, "Actually, maybe that doesn't need to be my only triumph. Like, maybe I didn't get the best score in the class, but out of my group of friends, I like really admire the different strengths that we all have, and they're not all the same". And that's just, that's life I guess, the unequal distribution of these things that we all kind of want. It helps to kind of look at your team and it just like appreciate that, and having a more team mindset because like if someone has a strength, if they're on your side, that's a benefit to you. So like, kind of knowing who your team is and also having that good support group like you guys said.

**Chevaughn** 33:59

I would say, based on my personal experience, something that's really helped me is to have a strong support system. Because the reality is you can have the best mindset in the world but competitiveness is still going to be around you just by the nature of the way things are currently. So like one of the things that's really been helping me is affirmations. I know that's not like the thing for everybody but like, I write affirmations down. I have them in front of me when I'm studying. And I think that that's something that's helped me helped me like, if I start feeling nervous or anxious because I'm like, "Oh my goodness, I have to do just as well as everyone else on this. I already feel behind on this," like, you know, you just start to get into your head because again, you naturally start to compare yourself to people I just like, stop and just focus on "Okay, this is why I'm great. This is what I have to contribute. I do have purpose," and like, really, I guess, you know, figuring out what works for you. Again, affirmations work for me, but I think figuring out what works for you to boost yourself. You need something that can quickly boost you within minutes. Just because, again, at any given point in time, you might be exposed to some level of competitiveness, and you have to be able to reframe that so that you're able to get what you need to get done. You have to be your own cheerleader sometimes. So figuring out whatever that looks like for you, whether it be journaling, blogging, whatever it looks like, finding your thing, that thing that helps you to get through.

**Jay 35:37**

I just sent this message to one of my best friends who is also studying for their MCAT where I was just like "Your scores, your resume, your application, whatever it is, is not a reflection of who you are, is not a reflection of your worth, your intelligence or your competency." And, like Chevaughn has mentioned, that's kind of like my affirmation and the way that I reframe and think about it all the time when I kind of get into this cycle of like imposter syndrome or competition or whatever is happening like my circumstances may or may not have been different from this person, but again, it does not reflect my intelligence, my worth and my capabilities.

**Chevaughn 37:14**

But just like knowing your Why, I think has been the biggest thing that also helps me through when I'm like, feeling like, "What is going on? Can I even accomplish this is like, why am I doing all this?" And like for me in med school, it's the patients. And when I'm interacting with a patient, it's like, this is why I'm going through what I'm going through. This is why I'm up late at night. This is why I'm studying. This is why I'm trying to impress some attending where that's not even really what I'm I should be focused on. It's because of this patient. I want to know that I'm getting the best education that I can that I can best serve this patient. And I mean in undergrad for me it was, you know, I was reaching for medical school, but whatever your goal is and whatever thing that you're majoring in, whether that be business, engineering, whether that be English, whatever you major and like, what is your Why? I mean, the good thing about college, I found, is that you have time to explore that. So you might not know that freshman year, sophomore year, you might not even know that senior year but you have this space and time to explore that. And that's one of the things I love about college. It's a safe space to do that. Like once you figure out your why, like, use that as your motivator. Like, at the end of the day. Yes, everyone around you could be doing more things or less things or whatever, but like, make sure you're focused on why you're doing what you're doing.

**Jay 38:48**

I'm like gonna like borrow that and may or may not write that in my journal cuz like I really need that.

**Dannie 39:00**

We need these things like, I think... I made one connection. I remember Chevaughn, you were talking about adult learners, like you're adult learners. What does that mean? You don't need any support at all? Like, we're all human like, like-- we nurture kids. And I think often kids are happy, like Jay said, when you were younger is because they get affirmed or they get to, well, they don't have as much pressure to do maybe outside things. And they don't have to get in their head as much they can just like be and they don't have to, like compare themselves as much. And also they just get, I guess, it's understood, it's understood that babies need to be held or they won't grow properly. Or if your kid is in elementary school and they dropped their ice cream cone on the ground like, like comfort them and make them know it wasn't their fault, get them another one or something like that. And there are different needs. I think when you get older, I think they definitely change, but there still are some things we have to pay attention to and a lot of them we can do ourselves.

**Jay 39:55**

That made me think of like... Didn't Tiffany Haddish have like a black unicorn or something like a stand up show? And I think--

**Dannie** 40:04

Yeah, the audio book, I think, the Last Black Unicorn.

**Jay** 40:08

I think she does a stand up show and like in that she had mentioned how she made a post on social media and like everyone thought she was like, super depressed and she was anxious, because I think that like she recorded herself like crying. I mean, she kind of made that analogy where she was like, sometimes people just need to cry. Like, you know, like when you see a baby crying, you don't automatically the baby's depressed or has anxiety. Like the baby's just crying because it's going through a rough time and it needs some love. Like what you were saying Dannie like it needs someone to come over--

**Dannie** 40:37

It's like a call for love.

**Jay** 40:38

Yeah, like give some validation. I think that's so important in higher education like we're adults, but we're still humans. We still have feelings and emotions and we still have things we go through and sometimes, like in higher education-- I'm not look, I'm not proposing advisors go up and like hug students randomly because that's a whole other issue. But I'm just saying in terms of that empathy and compassion, like yes, we're adults, yes we have like our responsibilities, but there's also like, but we're still people, we still need compassion. And we still need someone to occasionally hold our hands to help us through some things as opposed to like kicking us and telling us to swim in deep water.

**Dannie** 41:23

Yeah, and I think we can handle it, but we don't fare as well emotionally when we're like kind of told to like, go and jump in the deep water, something like that. And so then the mental part starts to suffer, but then maybe the performance doesn't. So then we're like, "Oh, this is fine." It's like that meme where like, everything's on fire. And it's like, "This is fine." Yeah, it's just not as sustainable.

**Chevaughn** 41:46

My other thing too, is I think, no matter what level you're at, in your training or your learning, like there's always, there's always benefit from having a mentor, of having someone with more experience until again it comes back to like you're a student, you're an adult learner. But yes, but like, there's, you know, so in medicine they have like the hierarchy. So like you have the medical students and you have the intern who's a first year resident, and you have the more senior residents and you have the attendings, like, each one of those individuals are helping each other out. And so it's like, more of a point of why you shouldn't feel like even if you're an adult learner that you shouldn't have any support. There's always something that we need to learn to get to the next point and to get to the next level. So it just like, bothers me that so many people feel like, "Oh, well, you're an adult learner figure it out." Like, that

doesn't make sense to me. Like, we're all lifelong learners, no matter if you're in school or not. You could have been in a field for fifty years and you still have things to learn from someone else. So I think just the importance of support again, just to reiterate that I think, I don't know where I was going with that. I lost my train of thought but, just again, the importance of even if **no matter what level you're at and you're training that you can always benefit from having someone supporting you.**

**Jay** 43:07

**It takes a village.** Collectivism.

**Dannie** 43:15

I think yeah, I think I think we're out of time. But I also wanted to just say like, I think we both already mentioned this, but just knowing why you're there and like why it's important to you so that way you don't have to turn to external sources for like validation as much, which it's funny because we mentioned needing that every once in a while, but we also mentioned it's so important to know why you're there because you're not always going to get that. So it's like a balance. And so I guess yeah, I guess you get it from everywhere. And then just being able to cultivate that in yourself is like bonus points because like that's going to help you a lot and it sounds like you all have developed practices or reminders for yourself of like, yeah, your purpose and like how it's not like intricately connected or solely connected with your performance or your vocation. **It's like, yeah, just part of your life. It's not your whole life it's not the end of the world.**

### [Rose-Bud-Thorn Song]

**Dannie** 44:33

I'll go first. So let's see... a rose from today. It was just a really beautiful sunny day and I went for a run with my brother. This is like the third time I've said this, okay. But actually, another rose was my friend and I started a writing collaboration project. It's like a blog, like very unorthodox and like, I don't even know how to describe it. But Jay, you've seen the description before and I think it's going to continue to evolve. So just something I'm doing for fun. And then a bud will be Oh, no I'll do the thorn. The thorn was okay, honestly, I've been having this like weird allergic reaction on my hands. And I'm not going to show you guys because it's very scary. And I have been in touch with my doctor and I did get a prescription for it. So hopefully-- the bud will be hopefully I'll get better by the time we go to Vermont this weekend because it's got-- it's on and off. So I think it's I think it's like atopic dermatitis or contact dermatitis or something like that. And I've had allergies ever since I was a kid. So it's nothing new but it's a new flare-up.

**Jay** 45:58

Yeah, I don't mind going next. A thorn was I am still. So my parents are still dealing with unemployment and navigating that system. And yeah, just really annoying. A bud is I don't know, like, I had a conversation with my cousin. And she was asking something like sciency and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I know how to explain that," and I was like, I don't know, like bringing back to what Chevaughn mentioned when she was like the why, being able to explain stuff. So I think it was like something about like, fatty liver disease or something like that. And then a rose is I've recently discovered my cat and I have

discovered this system. I have this like cat tree next to me when I'm studying and like when I put things on his like, platform, and so when he wants to sit next to me, he'll like meow and like paw at it and that's his like, way of telling me like move your stuff, I'm sitting next to you. And I think it's like the sweetest thing ever. But yeah, that was my rose.

**Chevaughn** 47:04

That's so beautiful. I like how you ended with the rose. So when it's like, you know bad news, good news first. So for me, I would say my rose. So my friends from medical school all of our birthdays, well, not all of our birthdays, but it's a few of us who have had birthdays during this pandemic. And my friends got me a birthday present, and I received it this week. So that was really sweet. It made me feel really special. Especially because I've been studying for an exam this week. And to get that it was just, it was perfect timing. A bud is that I will do well on this exam. I've been studying for weeks for it. And I would say the thorn it's just like the guilt that I felt from not being able to be more active in terms of with everything going on. I would love to be involved in protests and doing more to address the issues that are going on right now. But I just know that like my side of it is that I have to get through these exams that I have to do so that I can get this degree and give back. So that's like how I've tried to reframe it but that has been a thorn for me.

**Jay** 48:29

So thank you everyone for listening in on our podcast. I hope you all have a great day, whenever you're listening to us if you are, and until we speak again, be well. Bye.

**[Outro]**