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Don't Let Assumptions Hamper Relationships

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Dr. Kristina Johnson shares topics outside engineering she wishes she spent more time studying in college, and offers a touching personal anecdote that explains how assumptions can be obstacles to forming relationships.



Transcript

Well, you asked a question just a minute ago about, what I wished I had learned when I was here. I was pretty focused in the technology place and I took as many technical classes, Math, Science, Physics, Engineering, and I wished, I would have appreciated more the Humanities they do take some signature classes from some of the great pros but not enough. And so, I didn't start reading, I think the books you'd find in the self-help part of the books store, so things like the Four Agreements, have anybody read the Four Agreements? Okay, so a few of you, right? So, I mean, it's just simple things about - they are very simple concepts but I can tell you, if you can master these you can run any institution in the country. So don't take things personally, always do your best, be impeccable with your work, and don't make assumptions. And I think it's the last one that I would drill down a little bit on, and that is; although I think, fortunately because of my sports background, I had an instinct about people, but when I went to Duke, the best advice I got was from Levenson, and we used to call Levee. He said, sit down and talk with people and get to know them. And I did, but I must say I made some assumptions that, fortunately I was able to resurrect. And one was about a faculty member who was very different than me, had taught a hundred semesters at Duke. A lovely man, gorgeous guy, Charley Harman just passed away this year, a fabulous guy, and I thought, 'we have nothing in common - I'm this young upstart, first female dean' and I made an assumption that he and I wouldn't get along. And as a result, we didn't really talk much for the first year, but then we started to build the largest academic building that had been done at Duke up to that time, which is very similar to a bio design project called the CIEMAS, Center for Interdisciplinary Engineering Medicine and Applied Sciences.

And Charley came to me someday and he said, 'you know my background is in mechanicals and 50% of the cost of your building is going to be in the AC and the mechanicals'. And I said 'Charley would you help me?', and he goes 'absolutely'. And we formed a bond. And that was surprising. Yeah, I think it was and it was very special, but I think it taught me that you really need to have - okay, like a kitchen cabinet. And he became my kitchen cabinet and so he would come to me and he would say, 'you know I think this faculty member needs a little bit of care and feeding', he'd just stop by his or her office and, it's really too important to have folks like that and sometimes if you make assumptions, you don't see that.