

Audio Transcription

Season /Episode #:	Season 4 Episode 4
Guest:	Dr. Maurice Endsley
Title:	Stewardship and Resilience: Unveiling Grassroots Leadership with Dr. Maurice Endsley

Dr. Shari Dade	<p>You are now listening to The Audacity to Fail podcast, a podcast about MisStepping into success. Get ready to dive into conversations and real stories from leaders as they share. How failure activates a growth mindset is an important part of learning and motivation for improvement. I'm your host, Dr. Shari Dade, psychologist with the National Center for Organizational Development.</p> <p>Thank you for tuning in. Let's get started.</p>
Announcer	<p>Support for this leadership podcast comes from the National Center for Organization Development. NCOD aims to increase the long term growth and performance of the Department of Veterans Affairs by collaboratively working with the leaders throughout the VA to improve organizational outcomes by supporting the development of an engaged workforce. For additional information on our services, click the link in the show notes.</p>
Dr. Shari Dade	<p>Leading from the ground up isn't always easy. It requires resilience, creativity and an unwavering commitment to the people and the causes you serve. But what happens when the path forward is riddled with obstacles and the challenges seem insurmountable? This episode will dive into the heart of grassroots leadership in our organization and explore the story, the strategy and the struggle of leaders who answer the call from within and work to create change even if the odds are stacked against them.</p> <p>Today, I am happy to be joined by Dr. Maurice Endsley. Dr. Endsley obtained the doctoral degree in clinical psychology from the University of Missouri, Saint Louis, with an emphasis in behavioral medicine. He is currently serving as the Diversity equity and Inclusion Program manager for the VA in Northern California. He also serves in several roles to support the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, including co-chair of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Resources Coordination Committee as a Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion consultant.</p> <p>He is also a Diversity Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee member. His interests include multicultural psychology with a focus on the impact of coping with race based stress on mental and physical health and his free time. Dr. Endsley is an avid gamer, enjoys seeking out comedy shows and watching or reading science fiction. As we shift our focus from leading the self into leading others.</p>
Dr. Shari Dade	<p>This episode is sure to inspire those who may be answering the call of leadership by craft innovative needs based programs and initiatives. Get ready to join us as we embark on the journey of stepping into success and celebrate the leaders who plant the seeds of change and nurture them with resilience, determination and unwavering dedication. This is the Audacity to Fail Podcast</p>

	<p>Season four Episode four Stewardship and Resilience Unveiling Grass Roots Leadership.</p> <p>Hi Maurice, how are you today?</p>
Dr. Maurice Endsley	I'm doing well. How are you?
Dr. Shari Dade	<p>I'm doing pretty good. It's so great to have you on this episode. I'm really grateful that you're here because so often when we think about leadership in our organization, we think about positional leadership. So we think about those who hold formal leadership roles based on maybe an organizational chart or an organizational need. However, I'm extremely hopeful and excited that our conversation is going to shine a light on those leaders such as yourself, who create or develop and innovate based on the direct needs in front of them.</p> <p>And so I'm super excited to dive into that. Are you ready?</p>
Dr. Maurice Endsley	Yeah. Yeah, Let's do it.
Dr. Shari Dade	<p>All right. So as we were preparing to figure out, like, what are we going to talk about in this episode, how can I highlight your great leadership skills? One of the things that you mention to describe your work and some of the work that you've been doing here within our system is grassroots. And that really stuck with me.</p> <p>And so before we jump into how you got into that work and what it means to you, what does grassroots leadership mean from your perspective?</p>
Dr. Maurice Endsley	<p>Yeah, that's a really great question. It's a challenging one sometimes to answer because I think it can mean a lot of different things for folks. I think for me in particular. It means like oftentimes you might be working without a formal support system or the search support system doesn't really exist. And so you're trying to figure it out maybe as you're going along and, you know, you're kind of bring in people who are passionate about it and find it, you know, really important work as well.</p> <p>And they kind of join with you. And then next thing you know, you're you're doing something much larger than maybe even imagined. So I could say for me, that's what the experience was like. And when I think about it, that's how it feels. You know, it wasn't like someone, you know, overall said, Hey, we need to do this.</p>
Dr. Maurice Endsley	This was sort of built out of clinicians seeing a needs issue as something that went unaddressed and trying to figure out as we were going along, you know, building the plane as we're flying.
Dr. Shari Dade	I love the points that you mentioned because grassroots leaders and folks who are in this space of creating this from the ground up, I often say are really special people. Right. For some of the reasons you mentioned, there may not be a formal structure. There may not be support or resources in the way that we would think about those things being present when we're creating something.

	<p>And we often don't think about that as a part of our organization. And so why do you believe that having the ability to create something grassroots or create something from the ground up is important to be a part of our enterprise?</p>
<p>Dr. Maurice Endsley</p>	<p>It's essential, honestly. Oftentimes, three things are driven by kind of priorities, and there's a lot of decisions that are made that are, you know, targeting the work that we're doing, you know, working with veterans. That's a really important work. But sometimes there are things that it may be difficult to see unless you're working with that specific population or you're seeing, hey, like I have a lot of veterans who are experiencing this or that or and I'm not seeing a whole lot like I can't find things that are really helping to address this issue.</p> <p>And so it really is amazing to see how many people in mental health do this often. But, you know, to find people who are passionate about the same thing and such an organization that's this large is it's really helpful and enjoyable.</p>
<p>Dr. Shari Dade</p>	<p>Absolutely. I know you mentioned a little bit about your journey into what this looks like for you. Can you share a bit about your background and maybe like what inspired you to even get involved in some of this grassroots programming?</p>
<p>Dr. Maurice Endsley</p>	<p>Yeah, you know, I think a lot of my time was spent growing up in Saint Louis and seeing the sort of dynamics that existed already brought me to think about how much race and ethnicity in some ways played a role in people's experiences. I was a bio medical engineering, and that's where I thought I was going to go into.</p> <p>And I had an AP psychology course that changed my whole trajectory in life. And, you know, one of the things we did, we we had a group of friends there in the course with me. We went as our project was to go around malls in Saint Louis and be as black or African-American. You know, somebody who looks Lebanese, someone who looks more Jewish-American and someone who looks like a German sort of white male.</p> <p>And we just did some naturalistic observations and seeing what happened and see how we were treated as a result and different models based upon maybe stereotypically socioeconomic status, based upon the areas where you live. And I was just fascinated. So by the graduate school in a multicultural lab. Fast forward through graduate school towards the end, and I had some experiences that that I think really continue to further my interest in sort of saying like, we really need something to help folks.</p> <p>I had a lot of friends who were bipoc or from other underserved marginalized groups who were really having a tough time. And so it's like, how do we do better? And so coming in to working for VA, I'm the son of an Air Force veteran and, you know, many other members of the generation before me and my family also served.</p> <p>And so, you know, it was really interesting as I started to talk about addressing racism, discrimination, what that was like, and also like seeing veterans who are telling me about these things and their experiences in the military, in some ways maybe they hadn't disclosed to others as I was like, Wow, there's really a need here. And I was really lucky to meet a practicum student at the time, Dr. Carlson, who was interested in the similar thing and had started it.</p>

	<p>I had written about addressing racism, discrimination and as a part of mental health in therapy because I hadn't really seen that in graduate school. So how could we start bringing it more formally into the therapy spaces and, you know, cognitive behavioral therapy, etc.? And then from there we built a group and that kind of took a life of its own after that.</p> <p>And it's really grown into something that we oftentimes get really great feedback from veterans directly about just how powerful that experience is for them. And so that's kind of been the journey, I think, along that path. I never saw myself as a leader per say.</p>
Dr. Shari Dade	Right, right.
Dr. Maurice Endsley	So it was kind of just like a bunch of people working together who really saw this as important work.
Dr. Shari Dade	<p>Yeah, which is really interesting, several points. One is that you didn't see yourself as a leader in those spaces. And we'll talk a little bit about that. But one thing that really struck me, based off of what you were just talking about, was taking that direct feedback from veterans being able to utilize that to create programing, to think about interventions, to think about those needs and how to create things based out of those needs.</p> <p>And the thing about grassroots leaders is often they do have a deep understanding of the concerns or the needs, the aspirations of the people that they're working closely with. And a lot of the work is really then focused on how do I advocate change or advocate for change from the ground up. And so being able to do that and being able to say, okay, you know, you made it sound super simple.</p>
Dr. Shari Dade	We started a group and this is where we are. You know, But what roles do those meaningful connections or collaborations? What roles did that play in this approach to creating something from the ground up? And how did you cultivate those relationships or sustain them?
Dr. Maurice Endsley	<p>They're vital. I don't think you could do nearly any of what I did without having those relationships or folks that were passionate and and in some of the same ways, but even different ways that kind of really help fill out some of the work that really needed to be done. And so really, I tried to focus on those relationships in some ways and which really changed the way I think I approach things.</p> <p>So, you know, checking in with each other as much as I can, trying to build support networks. I mean, part of this was like, Hey, this is really difficult work. When I first started, I need a lot of processing to manage my own reactions, you know, you know, some of the things hit home in a different way and managing it was not quite something.</p> <p>We were taught a lot in graduate school. So part of was like, okay, like how do I support the people who are coming in doing this work? Like how do I make space for them? I know I needed that when, when, when I first started doing it. So I spent a lot of time outside of doing the group intervention, just trying to connect and do those things and just meet up.</p>

	<p>And sometimes it maybe was just like, Hey, let's just chat and over lunch or something like that or after work, you're you just kind of need to process what's going on.</p>
<p>Dr. Shari Dade</p>	<p>Sure, those relationships are vital. Those connections are vital. Right. And I think oftentimes I've heard leaders say that leadership can feel lonely, that it can feel like you're kind of on an island by yourself, kind of doing your own thing. And the importance of thinking about who are those connections, whether it be people, whether it be support groups, whether it be other offices or other programs, like where can you find that support?</p> <p>And so I think that's something that's so important and even more important when it comes to creating something from the ground up or creating these grassroots efforts. One of the things that you talked about was not even seeing yourself as a leader in that moment. And hindsight, looking back, being able to say like, I did do quite a bit of leadership along the way.</p> <p>What do you think are some of the different characteristics of a leader, the things that would help someone who's wanting to be in this space, creating maybe grassroot initiatives or programing based on needs?</p>
<p>Dr. Maurice Endsley</p>	<p>It's a really great question and thinking about it along the way, I'm going to say something that probably sounds too often repeated but is so true. Listen, listen and and listen even more because I think that that piece of it was really important. So really being open to that feedback, especially if you're creating and creating something new, there isn't a lot of data to draw from potentially.</p> <p>And so you've got to get the data where it's most helpful, which is from the people that are going to be experiencing, at least in the intervention, right? So hearing the feedback from veterans and trying to think through, okay, how do I shift it, how to make it fit better, being able to understand, okay, these are things I can't do and I can't do throughout that process, right?</p> <p>They're just some things that just really are kind of outside the bounds of what we have and our boundaries in that space. And, you know, but still, even though the answer is no, I feel like it's really important to sort of talk through it and really understand what's the impact of that. No. And try to, you know, make sure that they also understand why.</p> <p>No. And so I think even in the relationships with folks, like sometimes are things I can't do or that I can't say yes to, you know, but trying to find a way to say yes can be really helpful. But, you know, when it has to be a no to really talk it through and understand the experience of the individual on the other end, I think that those are really key.</p> <p>I think sometimes leaning in to those things that keep you going, you know, I think sometimes it's been really challenging, whether it be pushback, criticism. You know, in the beginning, things weren't always quite working, how we anticipated some things that we thought would be helpful weren't. And so we had to back up and redo it and find something that worked better and stretch ourselves outside of maybe some of our traditional training as well.</p>

	<p>And so being able to kind of go back and think about what it is and why I'm doing it, it's helpful to get those messages either from the people you support or for the people that are experiencing the intervention. In our case, hearing that feedback was so helpful, so much that we built it in, I think, to our work, you know?</p> <p>So it's another way for folks to listen to what's working. Well, sometimes it's important to go back to, okay, yeah, things are working well, maybe not everything, but many things are working well. And just keep talking about what you're doing. I think that that's the biggest lesson I learned. You know, I know the relationships are important and I enjoy that and I thrive on that.</p>
Dr. Maurice Endsley	<p>But don't be afraid to talk about it and what you do it. I actually don't think our racial trauma work would have been where it was if I had just stopped talking about it. So when I'm right from my internship, I was like, that was a really cool experience. Like, you know, it was tough, it was stressful, you know, as we tried to figure it out and kind of get a workable model.</p> <p>And I kind of said, I'm going on to my my post-doc residency. And that's probably the end of that. And I remember I brought it up in a meeting, and this is one of those lessons I also learned about just listening. And my mentor at the time said, You talked about that and I really thought we need something like that here.</p> <p>Would you be willing to work on that? And I'll make the space for you to do that. And so I think that those that, you know, that was really powerful, right? Because in my brain I'm saying, that's it. It's not really going to go anywhere. And I kind of talk myself out of it. And it took that little bit of a spark from a leader, at least in my eyes, a mentor in my eyes, and a formal mentor to sort of rethink talking myself out of things.</p>
Dr. Shari Dade	<p>Absolutely. Absolutely. So, so many amazing points. The first one being listened. Yeah, I think that's the foundation is so much of the work that leaders have to do in order to be effective, but also, I love this piece around talking about your work, talking about the work you're doing, talking about it in a way that's passionate, that in a way that will inspire or pique other people's interest at being able to get them engaged and to be able to share the the importance of the work with others, which I think can can be difficult at times, especially if the work that you're doing is new or novel or, you know, you're still in the space of creating it and getting it moving. But then also this idea of continue saying when the going gets tough because it will, and especially grassroots leadership, it's not always smooth sailing. Don't always say, I've got an idea. And then everyone's like, Yes, let's run it to the finish line. There are things that are obstacles that get in the way, and remaining motivated can sometimes be difficult in those spaces.</p> <p>What has been motivating for you that helped you continue these grassroots efforts, even in the face of obstacles and resistance?</p>
Dr. Maurice Endsley	<p>I always go back to the stories of the know the veterans that we've worked with, my own family members. You know, as I started talking more about these things, write those stories and the impact of what happened to many of them</p>

	<p>as a result of racism and discrimination, always keeps me going, but also seeing the end goal sometimes.</p> <p>So after someone's gone through that, that gotten the support they've really seen sometimes light bulb moments or maybe this is the first time they really disclose something that happened to them and to get that sense of acceptance and validation and that they weren't alone anymore. I think, you know, hearing those stories and the feedback that we've gotten, try to keep that in mind.</p> <p>Sometimes I pull up one of the articles we published, which has some of the the feedback and some of the overall kind of general feedback that we've gotten about it. And I kind of have to remind myself like, this is a power and I sometimes run into people along the way who've either been clinicians, who've been leading one of the groups at this point, and they're like, I didn't know.</p> <p>And you know, this has been so powerful for me and I've really been needing something like this. And so I think those stories I try to carry with me. So even when times feel challenging or difficult, maybe there's a lot of pushback, there's not a lot of funding, support, whatever it may be. Those stories help me to keep moving forward.</p> <p>Yeah, and reminder that this is what it's for. And so those are really important. But then also kind of like having good rock solid folks with you along the way. So one of the things I always did is, you know, I learned early on that sometimes it feels too heavy to do by myself. So I always try to have at least a co-leader or co-chair or someone illustrate.</p> <p>So when the work continues, if I'm out sick or whatever it is, you know, the first reason why I focused on having that was because if I'm sick, then who leads the group, right? And and I want to make sure that that they at least are some continuity We we don't have to cancel. And so that also turned into you also had some really rock solid people along the way who joined who were there.</p> <p>And so when I'm kind of like, okay, I need to take a step back, they're stepping up and being able to kind of do that dance with each other, I think really made it a lot easier so we could take care of ourselves but also still continue to do the work.</p>
Dr. Shari Dade	<p>Yeah, and I really want to point out that this one group that you started during your internship year has now grown into multiple groups across our enterprise, right? And full programing in different places within different facilities. And so being able to start something based off of your own personal experience, your own personal injuries, knowing and hearing the needs from our veterans, from others in your path, and then being able to create something that is sustained across and even now moving out of more of that clinical role and to the role that you have now as a diversity equity and inclusion program manager, those are kind of the seeds that when we think about grassroots work, how it does plant the seeds and it does allow for there to be continued effort and being able to keep that momentum going. So I definitely wanted to point that out because it's that, you know, at first it was sounding like, he did a group. But no, it's much bigger than that. And being able to sit in that and feel how much</p>

	power that holds I think is really important. So I want to give you some flowers in that space.
Dr. Maurice Endsley	Thank you.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah. Yeah. So one of the things that I think can be difficult for grassroots leaders because it is like you said, sometimes it can be really heavy doing the work for many reasons. Maybe there aren't a lot of resources or there is some resistance or pushback. How did you or how do you still prioritize self-care to avoid burnout when leading others through these efforts?
Dr. Maurice Endsley	It's a really great question. Early on, I think that was definitely an area of growth.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, me.
Dr. Maurice Endsley	<p>Especially because I think I at that time I was just talking about it all the time and, and really try to reason it out. And it was my first time really delving deep into doing this work in a way that I have been, you know, impacted personally by some of the things we're talking about.</p> <p>And so I think earlier on, you know, my way of dealing with it was like actually just to spend time talking about it with my co facilitators and just like dealing with it kind of processing my own reactions. It was exhausting, but also helpful because I was able to kind of think through the emotions what were mine, what were, you know, what? We're showing up in groups, so to speak, that weren't mine. But, you know, am I reacting to it in a certain way?</p> <p>And just to address those questions, I think the other piece of it now is really, you know, enjoying the people that I do the work with. So like not focusing just on the work, but, you know, trying to get to know them, spend time with them, doing things that were outside of just talking about the group race or really building that relationship, I think was helpful for me and is a form of self-care. I'm not super extroverted, but I do like that company of just good people that you resonate with and it's something that's really refilling for me.</p> <p>So maybe sort of that extroverted ness. And I think too, it's like I try to turn it off once I leave, and I think that's something I've been more strict about, is that once I kind of leave the work, if I can't turn it off, I'll do a phone call. Living out here. I might do a phone call to one of my parents or something like that, and just kind of like, you know, try to get it out before I get home and so I can make that transition.</p> <p>I learned that when I had a very short commute from work. That doesn't work for me because I don't have that transition time. So I try to to to make sure that I have good transition time. And then honestly, like, that's where there's things like gaming and other types of stuff also really become helpful because sometimes I can't think about that stuff because I have to really focus on what I'm doing and I focus on kind of like the hand-eye coordination, all that fun stuff.</p>

<p>Dr. Maurice Endsley</p>	<p>And oftentimes it's also a social place. And so my mind is shifting to those things and my brain is sort of occupied so I can make that transition. And then comedy. I have one colleague that she can find the humor in so many different things in ways that sometimes I can't. And, you know, so I think, again, it's about that balance of the people around you.</p> <p>And so, you know, having people around you that can sort of say, hey, you know, part of the reason why some of that pushback exists is because you're doing something, you're doing something that's impactful, you're changing things, and change is hard for people. And so sometimes there's going to be pushback. And so how to reframe. So I think, you know, having the people around me too, is a definitely very much a form of my self care and music.</p> <p>So we're kind of joking about picking music. You know, we started and that is one of the main ways that I shift is good music on the way home for me is that self-care moment. So I always have to have a nice kind of stereo playlist there.</p>
<p>Dr. Shari Dade</p>	<p>Yeah, yeah.</p>
<p>Dr. Maurice Endsley</p>	<p>And as I drive home so that that makes a big difference for me.</p>
<p>Dr. Shari Dade</p>	<p>Certainly. Well, finally, what advice would you give any aspiring leaders who are passionate about creating change from the ground up but may feel discouraged or afraid if they face challenges as they're creating these grassroots programs or initiatives?</p>
<p>Dr. Maurice Endsley</p>	<p>One Don't be afraid to talk about what you're doing, especially if it's driven to make a positive change for the especially veterans that we serve or making VA a better place. You know, don't be afraid to talk about it with people, you know, and, you know, talk to your employees, you know, that maybe you're working with maybe your colleagues or you're working with right there meet.</p> <p>And then you'll find that there are probably other people who maybe for different reasons, you know, want to see a change, too. And and being able to kind of build that network, get to know each other. Listen, I told you I was going to come back around, you know, to to their interests and like, see how it aligns.</p> <p>You know, I have a lot of skills, I think. And there's many areas I'm just not strong in or things I just don't enjoy doing. But there are people out there who do. And so I try to lean into that, try to find opportunity ideas for people to even if it's in, you know, an informal role, they're like step in and do the things that they're interested in or passionate about.</p> <p>So research is something that I was I was like, I never have time. And it's something I was like, that's just not something. It's very tedious. And in a lot of ways research is great, but it's not something I was really super excited about. I like the ideas and the implementation. The middle parts are tough, but there are people who really enjoy those middle parts and bringing, you know, being able to talk about that and engage them with their interests is something.</p> <p>So being able to like build that relationship with people and don't hesitate to try to reach out and talk to people and see if there are other people who might be interested in coming along with you. that's.</p>

Dr. Shari Dade	<p>Perfect. That's perfect. Great advice. Amazing episode. Can you believe we're already at the end here? So I appreciate you being a part of just this conversation because like I said, naturally, when we think about leadership in our system, we think about the more formalized positions or titles. And there are so many amazing, incredible people in our system who are creating things from the ground up there.</p> <p>They're starting things, they're developing things. They're getting that direct feedback from our veterans and they are doing the work. And so I appreciate you for sharing some of what you've done that's been helpful and just some of the areas where you've been able to move and learn and continue to grow and apply to the work that you're continuing to do today.</p> <p>So I certainly appreciate that. But before you go, we're going to play a game, a word association, which I know you are all too familiar with as a fellow psychologist. So I'm going to give you three phrases or words, and I'd like to hear some of your first words or thoughts that come to mind. Okay.</p>
Dr. Maurice Endsley	All right.
Dr. Shari Dade	All right. So the first word is stewardship.
Dr. Maurice Endsley	That's, I think, the basis for everything I grew up in Jesuit Catholic land, and so being a steward, men and women for others, is what it reminds me. Answer reminds me of that background and that setting.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, I know you mentioned you leadership as a, as a stewardship and in some of the grassroots work as a way of being a good steward to the folks that we serve. So absolutely, Absolutely. The next word, of course, is grass roots.
Dr. Maurice Endsley	The beginning of everything. I think most things start in that way. And so it's people with great ideas, people seeing a need and trying to figure out how to address it and working with other people at the same level.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, and last but certainly not least, the audacity to fail.
Dr. Maurice Endsley	<p>How I mean, I think about you have to be okay with that at the end. I think if you aren't okay with making mistakes or failing, then nothing can be created. We've made a lot of mistakes, especially early on, things that we thought worked did it, and that was the direct feedback from veterans and other therapists. And so we re we kind of rethought about it and changed it.</p> <p>And had we not done that, have we not taken that risk Right. This wouldn't you know, there wouldn't be this available to folks. And I think a lot of people do that often.</p>
Dr. Shari Dade	Well, thank you, Morris. This has been more than a pleasure having some time to sit and chat and just talk a little bit about some of the extraordinary work that you've done and that you continue to do within our system. So I really appreciate it.
Dr. Maurice Endsley	Thank you for having me. This is massive.
Dr. Shari Dade	So we've come to the end of another great episode of The Audacity to Fail podcast. Thank you for tuning in to learn how missteps can lead to growth and success, Be sure to check out the key lessons in the show notes for a refresher.

	<p>To request services from the National Center for Organization Development, check out our Web site. Also linked in the show notes. Remember, if you missed the target 100 times, you have not failed. Instead, you've simply found 100 strategy that did not work. Be well and continue to fail forward until next time. Thank you.</p>
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