

SPECIAL EPISODE: Remembering John Crawley

[theme music fades in, gentle piano, melancholy loop]

PROFESSOR CRAWLEY (lecture recording):

How many times have I said to you, "Reach, Challenge." Right? "Fail. Do it again." ...
Those who don't fail frequently, succeed less often.
You will get there. Don't listen to anybody who says that you won't. [Voice trails off...].

[25 seconds]

NICK CASTILLO (Narrator):

In spring of 2023, Professor John Crawley told the staff at Perseverantia that his students had always told him that he should have a podcast to record the crazy advice he gives them. We thought about putting together short snippets of his advice to tack onto the end of a podcast episode. Whether for a profound moment or some levity. Sadly, we never got the chance to make that podcast. Professor Crawley of the Business Administration Department at Fitchburg State passed away unexpectedly on May 1st, 2024.

So today we present to you the podcast that could have been, drawing from donations from former students, colleagues, and friends. In the midst of grieving, and before campus shut down for the summer, we were able to gather these remembrances and documents of Professor Crawley's influence as a teacher and mentor.

[1min 13sec]

[music continues]

PROFESSOR CRAWLEY (lecture recording):

You guys all can do it. See, the problem is you live in environments, most of you, where it hasn't been done. And I did too! But if you surround yourself with those five people I talked about? And all of a sudden you're always talking about success, you're going to find it.

NICK CASTILLO:

He was known for appreciating students for all their potential. He held them to high standards and encouraged them to reach out for more. As one student remembered,

"Professor Crawley and I would meet almost weekly to talk about the Fitchburg State lacrosse team. He loved coming to all our games. One day, when I walked into his office, he had a picture of me up on his wall from a lacrosse game I didn't even know he was at.

"And honestly, he brought me to tears. I've never had somebody as supportive as Dr. John Crawley in my life. And he left me with some words. Your light is the brightest I've ever seen. You came to the school as a freshman and immediately distinguished yourself as a leader and overcame all obstacles thrown at you.

[2min 12sec]

During my first few semesters, I would write down some of the admirable things he would say to us in class.

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PROFESSOR CRAWLEY (lecture recording):

Write out a long thank you card or a thoughtful letter to a friend....Give somebody else a little piece of your heart and they'll never, ever forget it. Okay?

NICK CASTILLO (continuing text of student email):

"When I was graduating, I wrote him a thank you letter, which included a picture of my notebook that had the things he said in class, such as 'Average is easy, don't be average.' 'The best day of your life is tomorrow.' 'Learning is best when you laugh at yourself.' And, 'Live as if you're going to die tomorrow. Learn as if you're going to live forever.'"

"Dr. Crawley sent me an email later on that night, which said the letter brought tears to his eyes. The end of his email warmed my heart:

[2min 58sec]

NICK CASTILLO (reading student account of Dr. Crawley's email reply):

"Students often believe that the benefits are one way. They're not. Certain students change our lives with every interaction as well. It is such a gift for all of us that teach to have the opportunity to watch you grow over a four-year period. It is such a blessing. It is why we teach. John Crawley. Shine Always."

[3min 20sec]

PROFESSOR CRAWLEY (lecture recording):

You've got to start asking yourself now, how are you going to live your life? And you're going to have a quality of life where you'll be hiking well into your 80s.

NICK CASTILLO:

A staff member at an alumni in development sent us an email she received in response to a question she posed to Dr. Crawley about the use of his language.

"Professor Crawley, I'm very curious about your use of the word 'shine.' Without being too much of a bother, could I inquire if there's any special meaning in the word for you? Sincerely, Jasmine Yang, Class of 11, Staff Assistant, Alumni and Development."

"Hi Jasmine. The word shine is very important to me. My philosophy, average is easy. We must become the brightest, most prepared and capable. The world, especially as it stands today, is depending on it. Shine, Professor J."

Here is Professor Crowley's advice as delivered to his students in the last lecture of the semester in May 2023, the year before his passing:

[4min 17sec]

[music fades out]

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PROFESSOR CRAWLEY (lecture recording):

So, a few summer goals for you guys. These come from conversations with students over the years.

First, sometime this summer, write down some things that you want to accomplish, things that you want to do. First and foremost, find something that inspires you this summer. That something that gets you up and out of bed and gets you going earlier than normal. Just anything. It can be small, it can be relatively insignificant, but find something that makes you think a little bit differently tomorrow than you're thinking today. Okay?

Second, find three things you can do better tomorrow. Meaning throughout the summer, come back here, better person in three different areas.

Concede an argument. Okay? Sometime over the summer just say, Oh, what the heck, you're right. Freak somebody out. Just say, you're right.

Do something for someone that they can't do for themselves. Your neighbor has gone in for a knee replacement. Lawn's getting a little high. Don't knock on their door and ask them if you can mow their lawn. Mow their lawn. Right?

Just once, all summer, do something for somebody else. Commit to making someone smile each day. Some days are crappy days, right? But you can find humor in some things.

[5min 48sec]

And when you do, it can change the whole perspective and driver of the day. And then lastly, buy somebody an ice cream. Do something -- a little extraordinary....

I want you to pick a poem. I want you to go sit some place in the sun, by yourself, and read the poem. Find a place to read a poem where you have to read every line --

[music fades in]

-- think about every line, and I guarantee you it will change your thinking.

[6min 19sec]

Alright, you can ask me anything. I always try to put this in the last class. Ask me anything. Personal, professional, education. [Ask me anything.]

STUDENT (from lecture recording):

This is kind of personal.

PROFESSOR CRAWLEY (lecture recording):

Love it.

STUDENT (from lecture recording):

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Um, when you were younger, like our age, did you I think it was, like, impossible to be as successful as you are?

[voices fade down as music fades up]

PROFESSOR CRAWLEY (lecture recording):

Oh, absolutely. I was a complete In anything other than sports, I was just ...

[voices fade up as music fades down]

It's a mental thing, too. You will get there. You will. You will.

I don't want you to leave this class today and think for a moment that failure is on your horizon because it absolutely is not. One of my jobs here at the university is to judge every single one of you. Okay? And I don't judge you to be a failure.

[7min 30sec]

NICK CASTILLO:

Professor Crowley's last lecture before summer, an annual tradition, were recorded in May 2023 on a student's cell phone.

In May 2024, upon learning of Professor Crowley's passing, a student wrote,

“Professor Crowley gave me such a perspective on life and the world itself that has taught me so much in just a short amount of time.

“I looked at Professor Crowley as a mentor, and I admired him greatly. I remember our one on one conversations, whether it was about the stock market, or fishing in Europe, or him showing pictures of his wonderful family that he loved and cared for so greatly. I remember a conversation I had with him the day before he passed away.

“It was during our class period and we were doing course evaluations. I remember going to fill my water bottle and he was sitting on his phone with his leg over the other. He looked up and said, ‘Hey Max! Come take a seat.’ I was always happy to have a conversation with Professor Crowley. He was truly such an interesting person to be around.

[8min 29sec]

“We started to talk about what he was going to do once he retired from being the Business Chair. We talked about the novel he was writing, and the stuff he has written over the years that he worked so hard on. He wanted to get them published after he retired, or during the next few years.

“I so wish I told him in that moment what I thought of him as a professor, and the life lessons and stories about the business world and real life has truly affected my outlook, and has helped form such a mindset for myself.

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“Professor Crowley meant a great deal to me and Fitchburg State University. I will forever cherish the short time I had in his classes and the conversations we had. He brought realism and uniqueness to his lectures, and I enjoyed every minute of those classes I took with him. I will miss him terribly. Thank you, Professor.”

[9min 14sec]

In the reflections we received, it was clear how unexpected Professor Crowley's passing was.

“My last time seeing Dr. Crowley was during class on April 30th. As I write this, I still find it eerie knowing that not only was this my last class with him, but the last class he would ever teach in his life. It is eerie knowing that my classmates and I were among the last people Dr. Crowley would see before he left.”

“None of us knew that see you on Thursday would be from heaven and not in the room.”

From another student:

“While there were many Crowley lessons, this stood out the most. He presented a scenario. We are a business manager, and in our firm, we have two outstanding employees, one of whom is Jewish and the other Arab.

“With the ongoing conflicts in Israel, these two employees refuse to work with each other, and it's starting to become clear it's causing problems in their efficiency.

“Crowley asked, what would you do to resolve this? The student answered, ‘I'm not sure there's much you can do. They each have the right to their own opinion, and we just have to respect this difference.’

[10min 25sec]

“Crowley's response: ‘No, what you need to do is have courage. Have the courage to pull these two into your office and tell them to resolve this. Talk to them. Remind them of their accomplishments in thus far, and the importance of working together. Tell them that they do not need to agree. Tell them that what we need to do is our job.’”

[10min 46sec]

Another student wrote:

“He was a model professor. I was among the last people leaving the class on the last day. He always stood at the door on our way out and would fist bump us all. While a simple gesture, it was one deeply missed when leaving the classroom on the official last day of class, May 2nd.

“I was planning on working with him the next year on my honors thesis, While he wasn't the most knowledgeable on the topic, he had faith in me.

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“He may not be around to help me with this project, but I'm incredibly humbled to know that he had his faith in me. As his wife said during the wake, ‘Go on and continue your good work.’ I will.”

From a colleague: “I'm here for development day. I've arrived early and John isn't here like he usually is, sitting in the chair near the window. We barely knew each other, but he always made me feel special. It really is simple. He was just so very kind and interested in everyone.”

One student wrote:

“You've labored so hard to make people like me better, both in character and in learning. We will never forget your legacy of impacting lives positively.

[12min 01sec]

“Thank you for your good works on Earth, particularly at Fitchburg State University. I am at a loss for words, but all I can say at this point is that you rest in peace and have eternal rest. Adieu, Professor John.”

NICK CASTILLO:

The John Crawley Scholarship has been established at Fitchburg State University to continue Professor Crawley's legacy of giving back.

For more information, there is a link in the show notes.

[music continues, fade in Professor Crawley lecture]

PROFESSOR CRAWLEY (lecture recording):

Alright, you gotta have fun, alright? Laugh at yourself. Have a good one! I'll see you on Wednesday, alright?

[fade out Professor Crawley lecture, music concludes]

[fade in Perseverantia network theme]

BRIANA CHAGNON (student)

My name is Briana Chagnon. I'm a Business Administration major with a Concentration in Marketing and Management. You've been listening to *Perseverantia*, the Fitchburg State Podcast Network.