

Introduction

Ethan:

Can you share what led you to join the Spill Teem? Did you co-found it with Joshua, or what made you commit to human-centered design and these projects over the years?

Keita :

Josh and I have been friends for 14 years. When he created the Spill Teem and I moved to Virginia, he asked me to join. He wanted me full-time, but I couldn't commit because I was working for the Department of Social Services in foster care, adoptions, and child protective services. Now, I work as a **quality improvement specialist** at a mental health agency in Chesterfield County, ensuring regulatory compliance.

Although I couldn't join full-time, I always support Josh when he needs me. He's knowledgeable, and we share a similar worldview.

Philosophy on Human-Centered Design

Ethan:

You mentioned that you and Joshua share the same values, especially in human-centered design. Could you elaborate on that?

Keita:

For me, human-centered design means **putting people first, then processes**. In my career as a supervisor and manager, I've always believed in treating staff as human beings, not just employees. I never ask my staff to do something I wouldn't do myself.

When mistakes happen, I see them as learning opportunities. I help my team identify their strengths, balance out their weaknesses, and find ways to improve.

When I worked in foster care, I managed multiple offices across Virginia—Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Richmond, Prince William County, and Alexandria. Managing a large team across different locations was a challenge, but I always prioritized supporting my staff.

Empathy in Social Work & Human-Centered Design

Ethan:

It sounds like your background in social services shaped your belief in empathy. Do you think your experience in foster care influenced your commitment to human-centered design?

Keita:

Absolutely. In social work, I've seen professionals who care deeply and others who see it as just a paycheck. Some case managers would refer to foster children as "**clients**," but I always reminded them: **These are children**. Many of them have faced trauma and feel like the world is against them.

You can't just place them in a home and assume they'll be fine. You need empathy, patience, and the ability to listen. Sometimes, the best thing you can do is **sit in silence and let them process their thoughts** instead of rushing to fill the space.

Applying Human-Centered Design to Education & Consulting

Ethan:

That makes a lot of sense. I had a similar experience in a university club where we taught middle school students about debating. Teaching children requires a different approach.

This reminds me of a professor at UVA's medical school who was devastated when federal funding for a food aid program in Africa was suddenly frozen. He believed in helping people, but those in power saw it as a financial decision rather than a humanitarian one.

Given this, how do you think modern college students—especially those interested in business and consulting—should approach human-centered design?

Keita:

This might sound cliché, but my best advice is: **Always put yourself in the other person's shoes.**

The world isn't black and white—everything is about perspective. For example, I appreciated that you asked for my consent before recording this interview. In the past, people have recorded me without asking, and that made me uncomfortable.

On weekends, I teach **parenting classes** for young and single parents, as well as parents seeking reunification with their children. A common mistake I see is **parents trying to be their child's best friend** rather than setting clear boundaries. This can create discipline problems later.

The Need for Support Systems for Young Parents

Ethan:

That's really insightful. I once had a graduate student in my class who was struggling to balance being a father and a student. He lacked a support system and was visibly overwhelmed. Do you think young parents need more structured resources?

Keita:

Yes, but they're difficult to find. As a single father, I faced many obstacles. For example, I was once denied **food assistance** because I was a man, and they assumed I didn't need help. There's still a **stigma against single fathers**, especially those raising daughters.

In Virginia, there's a **Fatherhood Coalition in Richmond** that offers support, but resources remain limited.

Ethan:

That's good to know. I'll share that with my student.

Managing Stress & Building Resilience

Ethan:

You've faced years of challenges while raising your daughters and managing your career. How did you handle the stress?

Keita:

Determination. I also journal and garden—**gardening is my meditation**. Growing my own food helps reduce financial stress.

I also apply **human-centered design in parenting**. Spill Teem has a conversation strategy framework, where you anticipate the other person's reaction and adjust your approach accordingly. I've used it with my daughters and in my job.

Should Human-Centered Design Be Taught in Schools?

Ethan:

That's fascinating! Do you think human-centered design should be formally taught in schools?

Keita:

Yes, absolutely. It should be part of **college and even high school** education.

I've worked in mental health, social services, criminal justice, and domestic violence prevention, and I've seen both good and bad applications of human-centered design. Many professionals don't understand it properly.

Relias, an online training platform, released a course on human-centered design, but they **completely missed the mark**. After watching it, I texted Josh to say, "Your Spill Teem is doing a far better job than these so-called experts."

Josh also piloted a **leadership series called "Human,"** which aimed to introduce human-centered design to business and community leaders so they could apply it in their organizations.

Affordable Parenting Education & Loopholes in Regulations

Ethan:

That's really interesting! I know Spill Teem is working on **Spill Teem School**, a centralized resource for human-centered design. Josh has also criticized Stanford Design School's approach.

I admire that you run your own **affordable parenting coaching business**. Many programs charge \$250–\$500 per session, which makes it inaccessible for families in need. How do you manage to keep your prices low?

Keita:

Virginia has strict **licensing regulations** for parenting classes, but I found a **loophole**. If I call it **"parent coaching"** instead of a class, I don't need certification.

I use a mix of curricula I've taught in Wisconsin and Virginia, including:

- **24-Dad Curriculum**
- **Co-Parenting UNI Curriculum**
- **Duluth Model for Domestic Violence Prevention**

Parenting isn't just about discipline—it's also about setting an example in relationships. Parents need to model **healthy conflict resolution** for their children. Kids who grow up in dysfunctional homes are more likely to develop **anger issues, defiance, and delinquent behavior**.

Final Thoughts

Ethan:

That's incredibly valuable insight. I really appreciate your work and the effort you put into helping others.

Keita:

Thank you! I could talk about this for hours—human-centered design, parenting, and giving back to the community are my passions. I continuously take training to improve myself so I can bring better strategies to my work.