

TAY NEAL OCTOBER 26, 2026

Inspiring Conv with Tay Neal Talk KC



Today we'd like to introduce you to Tay Neal.

MY

VoyageKC

LOCAL STORIES

SHARE

TWEET

PIN

CONNECT

TO TOP

LATES
VIDEO

HIGHLIGHTING LOCAL GEMS

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTER SERIES

Hi Tay, we're thrilled to have a chance to learn your story today. So, before we get into specifics, maybe you can briefly walk us through how you got

to
where
you are
today?
I am a
husband,
father,
educator,
activist,
and
community
builder
with a
heart for
all
children,
especially
Black
and
Brown
boys,
and a
vision
for
liberation
through
mentorship,
literacy,
and
character
development.

I am a
proud
Kansas
City
native,
and my
story
begins
in the
project
housing
at 7
Oaks,
near
39th and
Elmwood,
an area
deeply
impacted
by gang
violence,
drugs,
and
systemic
disinvestment.
I
received
my early
education
in
Kansas

City
Public
Schools
and the
Center
School
District.
I grew
up in
poverty,
relying
on
government
assistance,
with a
father
who was
incarcerated
for most
of my
childhood.
My early
years
were
marked
by a
long list
of
traumatic
experiences,
including

alcohol
and drug
addiction,
family
mental
health
struggles,
domestic
violence,
community
murders,
incarceration,
food
insecurity,
and
generational
trauma.
I know
firsthand
the
silent
toll that
adversity
takes on
children
who are
just
trying to
survive.

During

the later
part of
my
childhood,
my
family
relocated
to the
suburbs
of Blue
Springs,
Missouri,
through
a
Section
8
housing
voucher.
That
move
gave me
a
powerful
change
in
perspective
and a
firsthand
understanding
of how
environment,

access,
and
opportunity
shape
outcomes.
I began
to
recognize
that the
circumstances
children
are born
into can
significantly
influence
the
opportunities
they
receive
and the
futures
they
imagine
for
themselves.
After
graduating
high
school
in 2010,
I

returned
to
Kansas
City,
where I
have
spent
most of
my
adulthood
navigating
many of
the
same
challenges
still
facing
Black
families
today.
My story
is one of
survival,
resilience,
transformation,
and
ultimately,
the
decision
to
become

what I
never
had.

There
was a
chapter
in my
life
when
hardship
and poor
choices
led me
down a
very
dark
path.
I've had
run-ins
with the
law and
made
decisions
that
could
have
cost me
my
freedom
or even

my life.
There
were
moments
when
my story
could
have
ended
before I
ever had
the
opportunity
to
discover
my
purpose.
I don’t
shy
away
from
those
experiences
because
they are
part of
what
shaped
me.
With
love and

support
from
people
across
all walks
of life,
backgrounds,
demographics,
and
ethnic
origins, I
did the
difficult
work of
changing
the
trajectory
of my
life. I
learned
that
resilience
matters,
but so
do
relationships,
resources,
access,
and
having
people

who
refuse to
give up
on you.
Today, I
use
those
lessons
to help
young
men
who
may be
standing
at some
of the
same
crossroads
I once
faced.

Education
has
become
one of
the most
important
tools in
my
personal
transformation.

My
academic
journey
has
taken
me
across
multiple
disciplines,
including
elementary
education,
special
education,
liberal
arts,
surgical
technology,
nursing
science,
marketing,
administration,
applied
behavior
analysis,
and
psychology.
I’ve
studied
at
MidAmerica

Nazarene University, Anthem College, the University of Central Missouri, and the University of Missouri–Kansas City. I earned my Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Special Education and continued my education through

graduate studies in Educational Leadership at Northwest Missouri State University. I am now pursuing my Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership at Rockhurst University. My educational journey reflects something I deeply believe: where

you start
does not
have to
determine
where
you
finish.

Professionally,
I serve
as a
third-
grade
teacher
in the
heart of
Kansas
City.
Before
transitioning
to third
grade, I
taught
sixth-
grade
English
Language
Arts and
Social
Studies.
Teaching

has
given
me a
front-
row seat
to the
challenges
our
children
experience,
both
academically
and
personally.
I've
worked
with
students
navigating
poverty,
trauma,
learning
disabilities,
behavioral
challenges,
and
circumstances
that
would
overwhelm
many

adults.
Those
experiences
have
reinforced
my
belief
that
education
cannot
simply
be about
academic
achievement.
Our
children
need
people
who
recognize
their
humanity,
affirm
their
identities,
and
understand
the
experiences
they
bring

into the
classroom.

Beyond
teaching,
I am an
activist,
community
leader,
nonprofit
founder,
and
proud
member
of Phi
Beta
Sigma
Fraternity,
Incorporated.
I've had
opportunities
to
mentor
people
across
the
country,
and I try
to bring
that
same

purpose
and
authenticity
into
every
space I
enter,
whether
I'm
teaching
a lesson,
performing
as a
musical
artist
and
poet,
facilitating
a
community
conversation,
or
helping
a young
man
navigate
pressure
and
pain. My
approach
has

never
been
about
fixing
people.
It's
about
pouring
into
them,
protecting
their
potential,
challenging
them to
recognize
their
own
strengths,
and
walking
alongside
them as
they
discover
what
they're
capable
of
becoming.

One of
the most
important
realizations
I've had
is that
just
because
I
overcame
many of
the
statistical
predictions
placed
on boys
who
grew up
like me,
that
doesn't
mean
other
children
should
have to
overcome
those
circumstances
alone. I
refuse to

romanticize
struggle
or
suggest
that
determination
alone is
enough
to
overcome
systemic
barriers.
It takes
more
than
hard
work
and
luck. It
takes a
village,
protection,
mentorship,
opportunity,
and
people
willing
to invest
in
children
long

before the world recognizes their potential.

That belief ultimately led me to establish The Talk KC, a barbershop-based mentorship program dedicated to educating, affirming, and elevating Black and Brown boys through mentorship,

literacy,
and
character
development.
I wanted
to create
the kind
of space
I needed
when I
was
younger,
a place
where
boys
could
have
honest
conversations,
ask
difficult
questions,
learn
from
men
with
different
lived
experiences,
and
develop

meaningful relationships with people who genuinely care about their futures.

The Talk KC is built around the belief that mentorship should never be a one-time conversation or a temporary intervention. It should be consistent, intentional,

and
rooted
in
authentic
relationships.
Our
model
brings
together
multiple
generations
of men,
whom
we call
Big Bros,
Unks,
and
OGs, to
support
the boys
we
affectionately
call our
Nephews.
Through
our
nine-
month
program,
we
provide

free haircuts, warm meals, culturally relevant literacy experiences, mentorship, character development, and opportunities for honest conversations about identity, relationships, decision-making, conflict resolution, and the pressures young men experience. We also emphasize consistent

communication
and
accountability
because
I believe
showing
up for
young
people
means
much
more
than
simply
being
present
at a
monthly
event.

For me,
the
barbershop
represents
something
much
bigger
than a
place to
get a
haircut.

Historically,
barbershops
have
served
as
gathering
spaces
where
men
share
wisdom,
debate
ideas,
tell
stories,
build
relationships,
and
learn
from
one
another.
I wanted
to
intentionally
reclaim
that
cultural
space
and use
it to

strengthen
the
connections
between
generations.
Our
motto,
“Cuts
fade.
Roots
remain,”
reflects
that
philosophy.
A
haircut
might
last a
couple
of
weeks,
but a
meaningful
relationship,
a
powerful
conversation,
or a
moment
of
affirmation

can influence the trajectory of a young person's entire life.

Although The Talk KC currently focuses on Black and Brown boys, my long-term vision extends far beyond one population or one program. I want to build

initiatives
that
serve a
variety
of
marginalized
and
disenfranchised
communities,
including
Black
and
Brown
girls,
single
mothers,
individuals
recovering
from
drug and
alcohol
addiction,
incarcerated
youth,
young
people
seeking
affirming
spaces,
families
experiencing

poverty,
uninsured
and
underinsured
individuals
living
with
chronic
health
conditions,
and
people
navigating
mental
health
challenges.
I
envision
creating
sustainable
opportunities
for
equity,
healing,
education,
and
empowerment
for
people
who
have

historically
been
overlooked,
underserved,
or
counted
out.

At the
center of
everything
I do is
my
belief
that
every
child
deserves
to know
they are
loved,
valuable,
capable,
and
worthy
of
opportunity.
That
conviction
is deeply
connected

to my
late
mother,
Ebony
Neal,
whose
strength,
stability,
creativity,
and
determination
continue
to
influence
my life.
She
taught
me how
to
hustle,
persevere,
and
make
something
out of
nothing,
even
when
circumstances
seemed
impossible.

Her example and her love remain foundational to the way I approach fatherhood, education, leadership, and service.

When I reflect on where I started and where I am today, I don't see a story of someone who simply beat the

odds. I
see the
impact
of every
person
who
extended
grace,
offered
guidance,
created
an
opportunity,
challenged
my
thinking,
or
believed
in me
when I
struggled
to
believe
in
myself. I
recognize
how
easily
my life
could
have

taken a
different
direction,
and that
awareness
gives me
an
enormous
sense of
responsibility.

I don’t
want my
greatest
accomplishment
to be
that I
escaped
the
circumstances
I was
born
into. I
want it
to be
that I
returned
to those
same
communities
and

helped
create
pathways
for
others
to
thrive.
My goal
is more
than
impacting
change
individual
lives, I
want to
help
build
the
relationships,
institutions,
and
opportunities
that
make
lasting
community
transformation
possible.

Everything
I've

experienced, from growing up in poverty and navigating adversity to becoming a father, educator, doctoral student, and nonprofit leader, has brought me to this point. I am still learning, still growing, and still building. The Talk KC is only the

beginning
of what I
hope
will
become
a much
larger
legacy of
service,
advocacy,
and
community
empowerment.

And in
many
ways, I
feel like
I'm just
getting
started.

**Would
you say
it's
been a
smooth
road,
and if
not
what
are**

some of the biggest challenges you've faced along the way?

No, it has definitely not been a smooth road, but it has not been horrible either, thanks to my team and my community. One of the biggest challenges has been fundraising.

It is never-ending and something I have to stay on top of while balancing the many other obligations in my life. I work full-time as a teacher, remain active as an activist, engage in community service outside of my organization,

and
continue
my
education
as a
doctoral
student.
Most
importantly,
I have to
make
sure I
am
mentally,
physically,
and
emotionally
available
for my
wife and
children.

It is a
constant
and
exhausting
balancing
act, but I
genuinely
love it. I
accept

the
challenge
and
everything
that
comes
with it.
However,
I would
be lying
if I said I
didn’t
experience
some
anxiety
about
the
possibility
of
dropping
the ball
or
failing
to fulfill
all my
responsibilities
with the
level of
commitment
and care
they

deserve.

Fundraising, in particular, has been one of the most demanding aspects of founding The Talk KC. Fortunately, the program has received an incredible amount of support from our community. It has inspired people, generated excitement,

and
brought
to life
something
that
many
people
have
wanted
to see in
Kansas
City.
That
support
has been
encouraging,
but
enthusiasm
alone
does not
sustain a
nonprofit
organization.
Financial
resources
are
necessary
to turn
that
enthusiasm
into

consistent,
meaningful
experiences
for the
young
men we
serve.

The
path I've
chosen
comes
with
plenty of
late
nights,
when
you'll
find me
sitting
at my
computer
working
long
after my
family
has gone
to bed. It
also
comes
with

early
weekend
mornings,
when
you'll
find me
out in
the
community
raising
awareness,
building
relationships,
and
fundraising
to keep
the
organization
going.

I am
learning
that
building
something
meaningful
requires
more
than
passion.
It

requires
sacrifice,
discipline,
consistency,
and the
willingness
to keep
showing
up even
when
you're
exhausted.
I am
incredibly
grateful
for the
people
who
have
stepped
up to
support
this
vision
because
I
recognize
that
none of
this
would

be
possible
without
them.

So no,
the road
has not
been
smooth,
but it
has been
rewarding.
I am
constantly
challenged
to grow
as a
leader,
husband,
father,
educator,
and
individual.
There
are
certainly
moments
when I
feel
stretched

thin, but
I remind
myself
why I
started
and who
this
work is
ultimately
for. I
don't
expect
the
journey
to get
easier,
but I do
believe I
will
continue
to grow
stronger,
wiser,
and
more
intentional
as I
navigate
it.

Thanks

– so what else should our readers know about The Talk KC?

The Talk KC is a barbershop-based mentorship program here in Kansas City that serves Black and Brown boys in grades 6 through 12. Our mission is to educate,

affirm,
and
elevate
our boys
through
consistent
mentorship,
culturally
relevant
literacy,
and
character
development.
We also
place a
strong
emphasis
on
violence
prevention,
conflict
resolution,
and
helping
our
young
men
develop
the
skills
they

need to navigate the world around them.

I started The Talk KC because I know firsthand what it feels like to grow up without consistent positive male guidance. I also know what it feels like to be a young Black boy growing

up in an
environment
where
the odds
are
already
stacked
against
you
before
you've
even had
a chance
to figure
out who
you are.
I was
fortunate
enough
to
eventually
find my
way, but
I made a
lot of
mistakes
along
the way
that
could
have

cost me
my
freedom
or my
life.
When I
look
back on
those
experiences,
I often
wonder
how
differently
things
might
have
turned
out if I
had
access to
the
kinds of
men,
conversations,
and
opportunities
that
we're
working
to

provide
today.

One of
the
things
that
makes
The Talk
KC
different
is our
approach
to
mentorship.
We have
created
a
multigenerational
model
that
brings
together
men
from
different
age
groups,
professions,
backgrounds,
and

lived
experiences.
We call
our
mentors
Big Bros,
Unks,
and
OGs,
and the
boys in
our
program
are our
Nephews.
That
language
is
intentional.
We want
these
boys to
feel like
they
belong
to
something
bigger
than
themselves.
We want

them to
have
people
they can
call
when
things
get
difficult,
people
who will
celebrate
their
accomplishments,
hold
them
accountable,
and
most
importantly,
show up
consistently.

We meet
monthly
from
September
through
May in a
barbershop,
where

our boys
receive
free
haircuts,
meals,
and
access to
mental
health
support.
We have
licensed
mental
health
professionals
involved
in our
work,
and we
recognize
that
some of
the
things
our boys
are
dealing
with
require
more
than a

motivational speech or a pat on the back. Between our monthly sessions, our mentors maintain regular contact with their Lil Bros/Nephews because relationships aren't built in 90-minute monthly meetings alone.

The barbershop itself is an

important
part of
what we
do. For
generations,
barbershops
have
been
places
where
Black
men
gather,
have
conversations,
exchange
wisdom,
debate,
laugh,
and
learn
from
one
another.
We
wanted
to take a
space
that
already
has so

much
cultural
significance
and be
intentional
about
what
happens
inside of
it. Some
of the
conversations
we have
with our
boys are
uncomfortable,
but they
are
necessary.
We talk
about
identity,
peer
pressure,
mental
health,
relationships,
violence,
accountability,
and the
realities

of being
a young
Black or
Brown
male in
America.
We also
make
room for
joy,
laughter,
creativity,
and the
opportunity
for our
boys to
just be
kids.

Something
that is
extremely
important
to me is
that we
don’t
approach
our boys
as if
they’re
broken

or need
to be
saved. I
think
that's a
mistake
that
well-
intentioned
people
sometimes
make
when
working
with
children
from
marginalized
communities.
Our boys
are not
charity
cases.
They are
intelligent,
capable
young
men
who
deserve
the

same
access to
opportunity,
guidance,
protection,
and
positive
experiences
that we
would
want for
our own
children.
We
recognize
that
many of
them
face
some
very real
systemic
disadvantages,
but
those
circumstances
do not
define
who
they are
or what

they can become.

As an educator, I'm also very intentional about making literacy one of our three pillars. When people hear literacy, they usually think about reading books, but literacy is much broader than that. We

want our
boys to
be able
to
understand
what
they
read,
articulate
their
thoughts,
think
critically,
recognize
manipulation,
advocate
for
themselves,
and
make
informed
decisions.
Those
are skills
that can
literally
change
the
direction
of
someone’s

life.

One of
the
things
I'm most
proud of
is the
community
that has
formed
around
this
organization.
We have
educators,
counselors,
therapists,
barbers,
business
owners,
fathers,
and
other
community
members
who
have
stepped
forward
because

they
believe
in what
we're
doing.
These
are
people
with
their
own
families,
careers,
and
responsibilities
who are
still
making
the
decision
to invest
their
time and
resources
into
somebody
else's
child.
That
means a
lot to

me,
especially
because
I know
what
that
kind of
support
could
have
meant
to me
when I
was
younger.

As far as
our
brand
goes,
I'm
particularly
proud of
our
slogan,
"Cuts
fade.
Roots
remain."
I think it
says so

much
about
what
we're
trying to
accomplish.
The
haircut
is what
might
initially
bring a
young
man
into the
barbershop,
but it's
the
relationships
and
experiences
that we
hope
will stay
with
him long
after he
leaves.
We're
not
measuring

our
success
by how
many
haircuts
we give
away. I
want to
know
whether
our boys
are
becoming
better
decision-
makers,
whether
they feel
more
confident,
whether
they’re
improving
academically,
whether
they
have
someone
they
trust
enough

to call when they're struggling, and whether they're developing the skills necessary to lead healthy, productive lives.

I also want people to understand that The Talk KC isn't just about keeping boys out of trouble. Of course,

preventing
violence,
incarceration,
and
other
negative
outcomes
matters,
but I
think
our boys
deserve
a much
bigger
vision
than
simply
avoiding
bad
things. I
want
them to
travel,
pursue
education,
build
healthy
families,
become
leaders,
explore

their
interests,
and
experience
things
that
might
not
otherwise
be
accessible
to them.

We're
still a
young
organization,
and we
have a
lot of
growing
to do.
I'm not
going to
pretend
that
we've
figured
everything
out
because

we
haven't.
We're
learning,
making
adjustments,
building
partnerships,
and
working
hard to
establish
something
that can
serve
this
community
for many
years to
come.

I want
people
to know
that The
Talk KC
is a
community
effort.
This
isn't

something
that
belongs
to me
alone. It
belongs
to every
person
who
believes
that our
children
deserve
better
and is
willing
to do
something
about it.
I want
our boys
to grow
up
knowing
that
there is
an
entire
village
of
people

who genuinely care about them, believe in them, and are invested in their success.

That's really what we're trying to build, and I'm incredibly proud of the people who are helping make it happen.

Is there anything else you'd

like to share with our readers?

What I want readers to understand is that this work is not possible without people who genuinely care.

One of the misconceptions I've encountered is that people outside of the Black and

Brown community sometimes feel like it's an overreach to get involved, connect with us, support us, or even share our mission. That couldn't be further from the truth. The reality is that we need the support of the entire community, regardless

of race, ethnicity, or background.

I think it's important for people to understand that The Talk KC was never intended to be an exclusive organization in terms of who can support or contribute to our mission. Yes, our program specifically

serves
Black
and
Brown
boys
because
we've
intentionally
designed
it
around
their
unique
experiences,
challenges,
and
needs.
But that
doesn't
mean
the
responsibility
of
supporting
those
boys
belongs
exclusively
to
people
who

look like
them.

If it
weren't
for the
support,
generosity,
and
encouragement
I've
received
from
people
outside
of the
demographic
we
serve,
there's
no way I
would
have
gotten
this far.
When I
talk
about
building
a village,
I mean

everyone
in that
village. I
genuinely
believe
that we
all have
a
responsibility
to invest
in the
well-
being
and
success
of the
children
in our
communities,
whether
they
look like
us or
not.

I also
want
readers
to know
that
we're

always
looking
to build
relationships
with
individuals,
businesses,
corporate
sponsors,
and like-
minded
organizations
that
believe
in what
we're
doing.
Whether
that's
through
financial
contributions,
partnerships,
volunteering,
or
simply
helping
us
spread
the
word,

there
are so
many
ways to
make a
meaningful
difference.

At the
end of
the day,
we're
working
to
reinforce
something
that
should
never be
up for
debate:
Black
and
Brown
boys are
capable
of
achieving
extraordinary
things,
even

when
they're
faced
with
significant
adversity.
They
deserve
people
who
believe
in that
potential
and are
willing
to invest
in it.

You
don't
have to
share
someone's
experiences
to care
about
their
future,
and you
certainly
don't

have to look like someone to help change their life. That's the kind of community I want The Talk KC to help build.

Pricing:

- $1 Donation
- $ 10 Donation
- $20 Donation
- $50 Donation
- $100 Donation

Contact Info:

- **Website:** **https://TheTalkKC.org**
- **Instagram:** **https://www.instagram.com/ttkc1**
- **Facebook:** **https://www.facebook.com/TheTalkKCoffi**
- **LinkedIn:** **https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-talk-kc/**
- **Youtube:** **https://youtube.com/@thetalkkc**
- **Other:** **https://Givebutter.com/TTKC2627**

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community; it's how we uncover hidden gems, so if you or someone you know deserves recognition please let us know **here.**

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