Nadja West

First African American Army Surgeon General and Former Commanding General, US Army Medical Command

Leading Through Uncertainty. According to Nadja West, the most essential quality in a great leader is empathy, where “leading is all about the team of people you lead.” This is especially true in times of crisis and uncertainty. In this keynote, Nadja draws on her more than 20 years of experience in executive leadership, crisis management, and disaster response, including leading more than 130,000 Army healthcare professionals and crafting the DOD medical response to the Ebola crisis. As organizations navigate new forms of uncertainty, including AI adoption, workforce disruption, and evolving governance, West demonstrates that the leadership principles forged in crisis remain just as relevant today. Sharing her career lessons learned, West demonstrates that good leadership and a loyal team come from strong communication, truly understanding your people, treating them with respect, and leading with empathy, particularly through hard times. She also explores how leaders can embrace new technologies while keeping people, trust, and human judgment at the center of decision-making.

Why Not You? Nadja West’s story is one of grit, perseverance, strength, and breaking boundaries, even when faced with adversity. In this talk, she shares her journey from being adopted as the youngest of twelve in a military family to becoming the first African American woman 3-star General in Army history — showcasing the power of asking the question: Why not me? Taking audiences behind-the-scenes of her storied career, from taking care of sick and wounded soldiers as a field surgeon in Operation Desert Storm to supporting more than 4 million people globally as Army Surgeon General, she demonstrates the importance of self-belief, bravery, and balance in overcoming challenges. Audiences will walk away empowered to face obstacles head on, be better leaders, and remove “I can’t” from their vocabulary.

Work-Life Balance: Managing Different Elements in Correct Proportions. In this talk, Nadja West — accomplished military leader, female trailblazer, mother, wife, medical professional, and more — shares her strategies and lessons-learned on achieving work-life balance. Using examples from her own experience defining and managing priorities for herself, her family, and her career, she demonstrates that to maintain balance, it is up to you to define the correct proportions — not someone else. That we must determine what is important and what we can live without, what we are willing to let go and what takes priority.