

Doubt yourself and steal, if you want to be great, says BSSP's Keith Cartwright

By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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The son of a Pentecostal pastor, Keith Cartwright grew up in church and according to him it was a very, very strict religion and it forced him to keep a schedule. Six days a week, 2 hours a day and 8 hours on a Sunday, he had to be in church. This schedule taught Cartwright a lot of discipline. It taught him to sit still and it taught him to pay attention. Besides all the religious and moral lessons that he learned, there were other disciplines that crafted his mind and gave him focus. In part one of this coverage, he lists two; having the confidence to doubt yourself and how understanding someone's process is the actual thing that makes you better.



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Cartwright shared with us that some people and his friends thought that growing up in the church was a restriction, but he felt it really shifted his perception and it gave him the ability to see things differently, which is the core of everything he says we do in "this business" and it's wildly important to understand that, he said as he took us through his personal journey.



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"These were the things my dad and mom instilled in me but these are also the blessings that I use when I get to work," Cartwright says about the disciplines he lives his life by. "Although they didn't directly tell me these things. My mom would never tell me to doubt myself, she certainly wouldn't tell me to steal things, to be stupid or to fail harder. But these are things that I learnt because of my journey, growing up."

Doubt yourself

The very first one is, doubt yourself and Cartwright reiterate that it's very important to doubt yourself. You have to put a lot of self-doubt in everything you do. Because when you think you know, when you think you've figured it out, you are no longer curious, he says.

Cartwright shares that he admired his mentors because they had enough confidence to doubt themselves. "And I think that is really the highest form of confidence when you look at something and say, 'You know I don't know.' That's the process in this business. There is no high ground. One doesn't know more than the other." He says although there is experience and there is reverence, and there is an understanding that people have gone through certain journeys to get where they are, there also has to be a certain level of self-doubt. "I say to myself always, 'Always be self-critical. **Perfection is the enemy of good, but good is also the enemy of great.**' And you always hear people say, it doesn't have to be perfect. Absolutely not, it doesn't have to be perfect, but it sure as hell has to be great. And if it's not, then maybe we need to start over and we need to spend more time on it. Because that's when we get to that special thing in work. When it's different and it shocks people and people starts asking questions and people want to engage with it."

Steal

The second rule is stealing and Cartwright introduces this rule by calling all the creatives in the room thieves. And the ones who are really good thieves are probably the ones who succeed more," he says. "One of the greatest thieves of our time is Picasso," he continues. "He had a quote that said, '**Good artists copy, but great artists steal.**' So what does that mean? It means admiring other people's work and taking from it and learning from it and being curious about how to document that process. Because that process is the actual thing that makes you better." He says he always tell his students, "The very first thing you need to develop is taste. And how do you develop taste? Sit still and pay attention. Put the pencil down, look, read, observe, open books. Understand who that artist was, what their process was, how they got there. Listen, pay attention, shut your mouth or ask relevant questions and wait for the response." These are all things that are in the process of stealing people's ideas. We're all not going to be here forever. It's our responsibility to train up the newer generations and to give them the opportunity to go on and to be better than you. So, we all have to continue to be thieves but do it in a way that it progresses our business. And always remember that nothing belongs to you. We are only borrowing things that have already existed.

One of his favourite things that he has 'stolen' comes from a Andy Warhol screen test. Warhol did dozens of these. And most of the time he'd just mostly models, but also friends to come in, or celebrities and he'd just put the camera on them and he would turn the camera on them and he would walk away. Cartwright explains that sometimes in 3-5 minutes you'd get to watch these humans evolve in their actual human selves. When you first stand in front of the camera, you look proud, you look forward, you smile. And this is the facade of who we are because we want that facade to be shown to the world. But if you leave the camera on on someone, they start to get uncomfortable after a while, they look around, they start messing with their hands, they start to get nervous and then you really start getting into that person's soul and you start seeing who they really are.

[Screen Tests - Andy Warhol](#) from [CW](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Click [here](#) for part two of Cartwright's talk at the Dstv Seminar of Creativity at this year's Loeries.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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