



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Kevin Kruger, who has served as president and CEO for the past 12 years of the National Association of Student Affairs Administrators. He has held a range of student affairs positions at Southern Methodist University and the University of Maryland.

B E G I N T R A N S C R I P T

Stuart Brown: Welcome to Student Affairs One Thing, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned student affairs professionals - what is one thing you have learned that has helped shape your professional career? I'm your host, Stuart Brown, founder of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most accessed websites for student affairs professionals. On our pages, we have the most cost effective job posting board, listing hundreds of open student services positions, a wide range of webinars and a virtual exhibit hall. We would like to thank our sponsor, the National Society of Leadership and Success, the largest leadership honor society in the nation, providing an accredited five step leadership development program for members to build their leadership skills With chapters at over 700 colleges across the country. The N. S. L. S delivers guaranteed student engagement, increased student retention and is financially self-sustainable. Learn more at nsls.org.

On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Dr. Kevin Krueger, who has been president of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators since March 2012. Kevin, welcome to the program.

Dr. Kevin Kruger: Stuart, good to be here and good to be in your presence. We've known each other a long time and it's kind of fun.

Stuart Brown: Yes, yes, we go back. Oh goodness. I think before you were in NASPA?

Dr. Kevin Kruger: Maybe. It's been coming up on 27 years. It's certainly been in that range. For sure.

Stuart Brown: Well, Kevin, what is your one thing?

Dr. Kevin Kruger: It's hard to have one. I thought a lot about this. I think I'm gonna tell you two stories that illustrate this thing that, there's really two things. Understand that I do this work because I love to teach and I love to lead. You know, I started off, I was at the University of Albany, Upstate New York. Was in the residence halls as a sophomore and I have this defining moment. I remember my RA, called himself the Duke. So the Duke was, you know, this is you know, in the seventies and they were doing programs that no one was coming to and I was aware that no one was coming to them and my friends were all, we were dogging the Duke because he wasn't doing a very good job. So I went to him one day and said, you know, hey Duke, you can spice things up a little bit. You know, what, how about if we can do a wine and cheese party. Now, this is a good example of the day, right? This is the seventies when wine and cheese parties might have been something college students would do. And the Duke turned to me and said, it's a good idea, you're in charge. And that sort of just activated a switch in me, which is the switch that remains today, which is innovating, leading, taking charge, you know, taking responsibility for things like that kind of thing. That started that process for me. The second story was at that point, I didn't know nothing about student affairs. I was going to be a teacher. I wanted to be a social studies teacher. So I was studying social studies education and I went into my very first classroom to student teach and, you know, have my little arm patch on, you know, a little nerdy thing. I was going to teach social studies to these 10th graders and what I realized after day one, literally one day one was that 10th graders had no interest in social studies at that point. So, I was like, what I'm gonna do with my life. And then I had this conversation with my hall director at the time, because by then I was an RA. He let me know about student affairs as a profession that was sort of the next switch that was pulled. And what immediately became kind of clear as I was doing it is that instead of teaching in the classroom, in high school, I could teach in a college setting and that was, seemed just much more appealing. And those two things really kind of marshaled together to kind of be for me who I know who I am and it's continued my whole life. I spent 17 years teaching when I worked on campus. When I stopped teaching because my kids were born, I started coaching youth soccer, basketball and baseball with my kids standing the teaching thing and I

think it's just been a value that has been part of my core of who I am my whole career and then the leadership part. I mean of course, you know, I'm the president of NASPA and obviously that has been something that continues to be an issue, but not an issue of sort of a driver for me. But I think, you know, Stuart, one of the things that I think I have come to realize on the leadership side is I no longer feel like I have to be in charge. In fact, what you learn as you become as I became president and CEO was being in charge actually wasn't the right way to go. That finding ways to empower others to lead in the organization, it was a much more successful strategy. And you and I both remember, you know, knew Gwen Dungey and Gwen was instrumental in that, in that lesson. I mean Gwen allowed me as the number two person in the organization to be, you know, have the span of leadership, while all her colleagues, other executive directors were saying, don't let him be in charge, he's going to take your job. And she had the insight to know that actually giving and expanding the range of folks who have leadership in your organization is really a positive thing.

Stuart Brown: So in a way you turned into the Duke.

Dr. Kevin Kruger: Okay, that's interesting. I had never thought of that, but yeah, I'll go along with that. Yes, Yes, yes, I did. Because that is what I in some ways, in a much more sophisticated way, is what I try to do now. And even for people who don't raise their hand and say I want to do this over the last several years, I made a concerted effort to reorganize at NASPA and part of the organization was to bring more people into a leadership role and to have them have more span of control. And then yeah, so the teaching I do now is helping develop leaders who also can do the same for their staff and they can sort of, you know, empower people below them. So you have more people who have agency authority, capacity to lead with an organization. So yeah, I guess I could go back and thank the Duke from all those years back.

Stuart Brown: Well, I also think it's important that when you look at your experiences and even going way back to your undergraduate years, that it's these certain events that have such a potential impact on you as you move along. I mean, you probably always had this leadership ability, take charge whatever, but at that point in your life, no one had said Kevin, you do it. But then confronted it was, you know what, I can do this and then, like you said, that kind of helped as you progressed through your professional career.

Dr. Kevin Kruger: So believing in people and inspiring folks you work with to reach their own like capacity or their own potential, I think is an important part of the role we play as leaders. So I really haven't thought about it, but I think that that's something that I've been doing my whole life.

Stuart Brown: And I think that's also very important for individuals listening to this. Maybe even just grad students, new professionals, that it is an opportunity to not only help the individual, but help yourself to build those connections and those leadership roles. You can't do everything. And a way to be a very good leader is recognizing who you can put second in command or third and take this project to help them, but also to help you as the leader where you're not doing everything.

Dr. Kevin Kruger: That's important. Both for two reasons. One is because you can't do everything and so you have to have people to that end. And you're never irreplaceable. Gene Ward, who was director of housing at Southern Methods University when I was at SMU - I was an area coordinator for two years - and I was thinking about applying for a job at Maryland, which I eventually got, and I was talking to Gene about like Gene, I don't know, I'm doing such important work here at S. M. U. and I don't know how they'll get along without me. And he looked at me and said Kevin take your finger and stick it in a glass of water and then pull it out. What happens? The water closes around. He said organizations do that. Organizations will adapt and you're never so important that you can't be replaced. And so I think that was another sort of part of that. Like so if that's the case, the more you build capacity around you, the better the organization will thrive when you're not there.

Stuart Brown: Kevin, thank you so much for sharing your one thing. These were great stories and again for me, I think it just demonstrates that almost like when you least expect it, something is going to happen. You're going to have that epiphany that is going to help down the road. Maybe not necessarily your career, but it's going to start to instill that let's say that seed to germinate. And let's see what happens.

Dr. Kevin Kruger: Well, thanks for that analysis. I feel smarter having talked to you Stuart.

Stuart Brown: Well, again, thank you, Kevin Kruger, President of the National Association of Student Personnel administrators. You have been listening to Student Affairs One Thing, a podcast that asks a simple

question of seasoned student affairs professionals - what is one thing you have learned that has helped shape your professional career. I've been your host Stuart Brown, the founder of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most accessed websites by student affairs professionals. We would like to thank our sponsor the National Society of Leadership and Success, the largest leadership honor society in the nation, providing an accredited five step leadership development program for members to build their leadership skills with chapters at over 700 colleges across the country. The N. S. L. S. delivers guaranteed student engagement, increased student retention and is financially self sustainable. Learn more at nsls.org. I hope you will join us next time for another episode of Student Affairs One Thing.

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