



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Carl Stiles, Director of the Memorial Union at the University of Rhode Island.

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 shaped your professional career? I'm your host Stuart Brown, founder of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most accessed websites by 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/our/program.

On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Dr. Carl Stiles on the program. Carl has been in the field for over 30 years. He is currently the Director of the Memorial Union at the University of Rhode Island. Before that he was the Dean of Students at Husson University and the Director of the Campus Union at Springfield College. I know Carl because we worked together, oh, probably 30 years ago? I think that might have been your first professional position?

Dr. Carl Stiles: That was indeed my first professional position.

Stuart Brown: And he has gone on to bigger and better things. Welcome to the program, Carl.

Dr. Carl Stiles: Thank you Stu. It's good to be back and it's good to have you around.

Stuart Brown: So Carl, what is your one thing?

Dr. Carl Stiles: Taking a look back through all the different experiences in the multitude of positions, you never realized that in this field you become almost an accountant. As you take a look back and you look at your budget planning, you look at your budget expenditures and it's one of those few things within either the Master's program or the Doctoral program that they really don't give you enough background and experience in basic accounting.

We all know how to balance our checkbooks, but unfortunately higher ed funding at many levels, whether you are state funded or institutional funded or auxiliary funded such as I am. You are in expenditures forecasting and debt management. And they don't cover that anywhere along the road. It's all by experience. So the one thing that I've learned through my career is the value in that ability to manage budgets, to work with students, so they understand their budgets not only within their student organizations but as an institution because they think money miraculously appears and that it's never ending.

Not understanding that if you're student activity fee is a dollar a person and you have 200 students on campus, you have \$200 and that's all. There is no ATM magically appearing.

Stuart Brown: So was there an incident or episode in your career where it really focused on the need to have some experience with accounting and budgets. Really, my prior position at Husson and my current one at URI, for two different reasons. One at Husson when you're the chief student affairs officer, you really have a divisional budget, single office that you're managing, but you are looking at expenditures and income for six or seven different offices and having to balance that within university's budget, as an institutionally funded organization. As an auxiliary, we are student fee funded and there's no magic bailout should we go over

budget. So right now we are planning a renovation of our facility and we need to make sure that, one, it's being done correctly and, two, that the funding that we're getting from the state is used appropriately for the renovation and because the students pay for it.

And that's something that a lot of professionals, especially young professionals, don't fully understand when you're an auxiliary. In most instances you don't get money from the institution. It is totally and singularly student fee monies and you need to, what part of your mission is affordability and access. You need to take that into account when you are looking at these large expenditures and that's one of the pieces that we're doing right now.

Stuart Brown: Carl, so if you have a new professional or grad student who's listening to this episode of the Student Affairs One Thing and they don't have that background or that experience, what is the one thing you would tell them to maybe get that experience or who they would seek out on their campus or maybe their colleagues or whatever?

Dr. Carl Stiles: You take a look at that and look to gain some experience. You have to really connect with the budget manager within your office, whether that is the director, whether it is an assistant or associate dean, the dean, the vice president or the university's comptroller's office. Really sit down with them so you have an understanding of the budget itself meaning where is money sourced from, how is it recorded as an expenditure and an encumbrance and then, you know, really see if there's an opportunity to be granted. Even the opportunity to manage a small budget, whether it is, your given \$10,000 and you're told that this has to last the semester and you have to program with it and you have to provide a monthly program that has to include promotion and then you're going to be able to see where all those little pieces come together in that budget and then meet regularly with your budget person. Don't just do it, you know, fiscal year starts July 1st. Don't just look at the budget July 1st. You need to meet with your fiscal person, minimally monthly. My Assistant Director of Accounting and Finance and I meet weekly. Not only do we go over the budget for the Memorial Union, but we also go over the student senate budget, which is an additional student fee on campus.

So we go over both of those in detail and that includes even when the students aren't there. I mean we don't have a lot of business during June, July and August, you know, we don't have a lot of students on campus, but we still need to make sure that we're on target and then we do a year end wrap up to say, what did we do? Well, what didn't we do well? What areas can we improve upon? And then we take a look at that and say in five years, how do we want this to look?

So that we've done that budget forecasting and that planning so that we can plan out, you know, it's great to think it's Monday and just plan for Tuesday. But as you move up in the field, you're looking, it's Monday, you're planning for three years from Monday and how to manage all of that and what comes between those two gaps and how to get there. And then when you get into a role like mine, you have to anticipate things like the roof failing and how do you pay for that or right now we don't have air conditioning in the building because our chillers are 35 years old and they're original to one of the additions and they don't make a part anymore, let alone the company is in existence. So how do you plan for those contingencies that are going to happen regardless of what you do?

Stuart Brown: I think that's really great advice, especially for professionals new to the field or even people have been in the field for a few years, that if you don't have that background, you don't have that experience, instead of just sitting back and say, well, I don't know, but to really search out for someone. If you have a large office and if you have a small office, find someone else around the campus that will take you under their wing to teach you.

And I think that's one of the great things about student affairs is we always like to teach. We like to be a mentor. So I would imagine people around the campus, you'll find someone that could show you the basics. I think it's a great idea. If someone would do it to say almost, hey, here's \$10,000 or let's do an exercise. Here's \$10,000. Here's your assignment. What would you do?

Dr. Carl Stiles: It is. I mean that is truly when you have the opportunity to have either provide for the position of a graduate assistant or associate or be one. That's truly something you want to do while you're in that role or offering that role so that they, the students are prepared for their first position. Walking into an interview and saying, you know, I had the opportunity as a grad student to manage a budget of \$10,000 a semester with the

goals and the outcomes identified with my supervisor and I managed that and attained what our goals were, is going to stand out in an interview, which other than other people that may say, I asked what is your budget experience and they're like, I budget my checkbook.

Stuart Brown: Carl, I want to thank you for sharing your student affairs One Thing. I think it's a really important thing and, like you said, unfortunately, overlooked in a lot of preparation programs and for new professionals. So again, thank you.

Dr. Carl Stiles: Absolutely.

Stuart Brown: You have been listening to the Student Affairs One Thing, a podcast that asks a simple question of season 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. I hope you will join us next time for another episode of Student Affairs One Thing.

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