



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Willie Banks, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs at the University of California Irvine.

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 program, I am very pleased to have Dr. Willie Banks, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs at the University of California Irvine. He previously served as the Vice President for Student Affairs at Indiana State University and has also served in senior level positions at Cleveland State University and the University of Georgia. Welcome to the program.

Dr. Willie Banks: Thank you so much and thank you for the invitation to join you.

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

Dr. Willie Banks: You know, that's an interesting question and I was thinking about this prior to coming on this podcast and actually it stems back to my visit. I was just home in Georgia, visiting my family for the first time in a year and a half and I went to go visit some colleagues at the University of Georgia and they came up to me and hugged. We hadn't seen each other in a long time. And it reminded me that really about being kind and really thinking about the people you work with that you're working for and all the work that you're doing in your job.

It really reminded me and they reminded me when I saw those former colleagues that what we created at the University of Georgia at that time and what I'm trying to create here at U. C. Irvine is a sense of purpose, but also a sense of family, of connection. And I think that a lot of that really goes back to being kind. I really think about the work that we've all done within student affairs and especially during this time of Covid and there's not enough kindness and that sounds so tiny, but for me it really does drive so much of the work that I'm doing.

And it reminded me going back to Georgia that I was able to create an environment where people felt heard. That they felt connected to the institution. They felt connected to the work that they were doing and they felt connected to their students and things have changed. And I think, you know, as time goes on that's harder to create in those environments. And so for me it's about being kind. It's about being good human beings. It's about making those connections with other people.

Stuart Brown: Was there an incident or an episode when you were at the University of Georgia which really sort of brought this to the forefront, where you said because I did this, I realized that kindness is the way I need to go.

Dr. Willie Banks: You know, I think it's interesting because when you're in these positions, and this was earlier in my career, and you know, we've all worked for some interesting individuals in our times and I think that in senior leadership positions we end up working for individuals that may not have the same values and not value

some of the things that we have, you know, within our individual lives and what we carry. And I think one of the things that's very, very important for me is that I always want to be kind.

I always want to make sure that I think about the people that were working with and I'll just share this story with you. You know, my parents, my dad was in the military for 26 years. He's a career military guy and later after he retired, he ended up working a number of jobs and one of the last jobs before he really, really retired was as a maintenance person. And I always remember no matter how many degrees that I have, I think about my father because that my dad could be a custodian.

He could have been any of those people that I worked with and not in management positions. My mother for a while, worked in a sewing factory. So you know, I always think about those types of positions and the people we work with and are really responsibility to really treat everybody with kindness and dignity. And so I think it was a number of things when I was at the University of Georgia, UGA is a great place, but it, it has its own issues and, you know, no organization is perfect.

But I definitely realized when I was in leadership positions that I had an opportunity to really set the tone and that tone was one of caring and compassion and even years later, and I haven't been at the University of Georgia in almost 10 years, but to have former staff members come back and say, you know, we really miss you and we really miss your leadership. And when you were here, it really felt like a family. That warmed my heart because it's been a good 10 years since I've been gone.

And I've now at my 4th, 3rd institutions since leaving Georgia, but to still have that impact on those students or not students, but those, those colleagues really warmed my heart. And so, at that moment I did think, you know, maybe I have made a difference and maybe being kind and leading with my heart, but still holding people accountable, but also take into consideration good people and just wanting to treat people with respect, can get you a long way.

Stuart Brown: When you were at the University of Georgia, did you think you were having that impact on people while you were there or was it something that you knew of? Or was it years later when you went to this institution or this one or finally at U C Irvine where you kind of realize that, you know what I was doing, I wasn't thinking of it back then, but now looking back over the years, it's like yeah, yeah, I was doing that and now I realized that that was important.

Dr. Willie Banks: No, I didn't realize it at the time and I think actually having moving to different locations across the country, working at different institutions, it's become much clearer as I've gotten a little bit older and then more years in the profession. This is my 25th year and I think, you know, what I was doing back at Georgia was really just an extension of me as who I am as a person and I didn't realize what I was doing as far as creating those communities for my staff and now, you know, years later looking back I can realize I was like, wow, I didn't realize I was doing that and I think, you know, as you continue to move to different locations, you try to figure out what those individuals and that culture needs.

And I think for me being in certain locations, creating a sense of pride also of accountability, but then also a fairness and also just being kind, has really gotten me a long way and I really credited, you know, to all the people that I worked with. This has not been a journey that has been Willie Banks by himself, but it's been a journey with a lot of different people who have shaped and molded me throughout my career.

Stuart Brown: And it seems also that people realize and people remember when you're kind, but sometimes like you're saying, you don't really know that at the moment, but you realize as you go through the career and maybe, let's say, new professionals or grad students, mid-level to really understand that, that you, you have that impact and that you can be kind and years later people will still appreciate and remember you.

Dr. Willie Banks: Absolutely, and it's, it just warms your heart because I do think, you know, and maybe it's me because I'm about to be 50 in a, you know, a few months, you start thinking about lots of different things, but you also try to realize, you know, what has been my impact on the world and then also in my communities that I have been a part of and for me last week's visit back home was really sort of, It was what I needed and I didn't know I needed it.

But just to see my former colleagues and just to see the love and admiration that we had for each other and what we had in that particular point in time, almost you know, 10, 15 years ago was pretty amazing to be able to relive that.

Stuart Brown: Willie, thank you so much for sharing your Student Affairs One Thing. I think this is a story that people should really take to heart and to really, it demonstrates, how impactful we can be in student affairs. You had that impact on not only people, but the institution.

Dr. Willie Banks: It warmed my heart and thank you. Yeah, I hope that people really can really think about how they treat others and really think about what does it mean to be kind?

Stuart Brown: You have been listening to the 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. I hope you will join us next time for another episode of the Student Affairs One Thing podcast.

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