



**Podcast:** Student Affairs One Thing

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**Summary:** We chat with Dr. Aaron Hughey, professor and program coordinator in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University.

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

**Stuart Brown:** Welcome to the Student Affairs One Thing, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned student affairs professionals - what is the one thing you have learned that has helped shape your professional career? I'm your host, Stuart Brown, the developer 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. On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Dr Aaron Huey. Aaron has been a Professor in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University for over 20 years. He oversees the graduate degree program in student affairs and higher education and has authored or co-authored over 70 refereed publications on a wide range of issues. Aaron regularly presents at national and international conferences. Welcome to the program, Aaron.

**Dr. Aaron Hughey:** Thank you, Stu.

**Stuart Brown:** So, Aaron, what is your one thing?

**Dr. Aaron Hughey:** Well, you know, Stu when you contacted me about this I gave this some thought and the one thing that I want people to understand is that what we do in student affairs is all about relationships. It really is. You know, I didn't start out that way. I thought it was like I learned these theories and techniques and this kind of thing. Those things are important, don't get me wrong, but it's all about relationships and our whole program we try to instill that within the students that we have here. And this really goes back to when I was a residence hall director at Northern Illinois University back in the mid-eighties. I was working on my doctorate at the time, but I was using working in residence halls to finance my education. And that was really my first experience in supervising a large staff. I had a pretty senior staff of four or five, I had 20 RAs, you know, we had a whole desk staff, we had 1000 residents in the building. We had two towers of 500 in each one. And I'm convinced that, you know, supervising resident assistance gives you insights into supervision management leadership. that, you know, it's hard to find in other types of ways because you all have these different personalities. Well the one thing that stood out in my mind, I had an RA, resident assistant, who was going to show the residents on his floor that he was in control. You know, he was very quick to write students up when they violated infractions.

And so the way the hall was set up, it was in a triangle. The resident assistance room was at one point of the triangle. They had a study room that was at the other point of the triangle. And then at the other point there was a residential room that was larger than the other student rooms. So students would always, there was kind of a lottery every year who's going to get the big room on the floor, but the multipurpose room was where students would congregate. They would study, they would play cards, they play games. Well on this particular resident assistant's floor, they would always trash it. And so he told them, you know, if you keep trashing this multipurpose room, I'm just going to close it and you're not going to be able to use it anymore. It's going to be over. And that was basically the way he told him. So they continued to kind of trash it. So one night he decided, well I've had it. I'm done. So he locked it and he put a sign, you know, since you can't seem to keep it clean, nobody is going to have access to the multipurpose room anymore.

Well, sometime during the night it was, it was probably or 3 or 4:00 AM, I hear this commotion and I heard this sound. Well I go up there because the resident assistant called me and said, you gotta get up here right away, emergency. You know, we've gotta call the police, call the fire department, everything. Well somebody on that floor had taken the door off its hinges. This is a true story. Off its hinges and threw it through the plate glass window and it landed four stories down on top of the cafeteria. It obviously damaged the roof. It damaged the window, damaged the door. And of course at the time, nobody saw anything, nobody knew what was going on,

what happened. And he wanted me to call in and arrest everybody on the floor and all this kind of stuff. And I told him, I said, well, let's get this roped off. We do need to get the police here and have it.

And so the next morning I said, you need to come down, we need to talk about this. And so we had a really good discussion. I've tried to instill within him that it's all about relationships. You know, There's 50 of them and there's one of you. You've got to figure out a way to get along with these people or they're going to make your life miserable. This is only the beginning. And so it took him awhile to kind of understand that. But he was one of those, you know, when you have resident assistants, you have some that want to be like little police people and you have some that want to, if I don't see it, I don't care about it. So you just do whatever you want. Well, you know, both of those extremes are not good when it comes to, you know, supervising management people.

But I try to instill within him, you've got to develop a relationship with the people on your floor. And then when you try to, you know, try to enforce the rules and try to tell them things, we're going to be a lot more apt to be receptive to you and you know, they know you as a person, not just as somebody who's trying to maintain law and order in this kind of stuff. You know, I've used that model over the years and I've used it, I've used that example in class. There's been a lot of other examples of the same things where people don't take the time to build relationships with other folks, particularly their students. They are trying to serve, they simply make their lives miserable. They make it a lot more challenging and people, people will respond to you.

You know, Stu I've known you for years. We have a pretty good relationship. You know, you can tell me things that I'm not going to get defensive about. I'm gonna take them to heart because I know you, we have a relationship. If you just try to be a professional or an expert or something and tell me, you know, I'm probably not gonna respond very well. But you know that incident still is very vivid in my mind because I use that in training a lot to talk about. You've got to develop a relationship. And if you're in a leadership role almost by definition there are more of them than there are you. You've got to figure out a way to get along with people. You know, so many people have said, the most important skill you need to have is, you know, how to get along with other folks and I think we're experiencing some of the consequences of people not having learned to get along with each other very well, you know, in all aspects of our society these days.

**Stuart Brown:** And that's a very hard thing I think, especially for young professionals, to realize that you need to communicate and communication is not always going to be positive and that to be able to accept and work within a framework of a group that you're sharing ideas, that you're not making judgments on people that again, it's not gonna be easy, and I know a lot of my work, I deal with parents and some people when you say a parent called they run for the hills. I don't want to talk to a parent and I have just the opposite reaction. I do want to talk to the parents because I think a lot of times they feel they don't have a voice and all they want to do is talk and they can be very angry, but I will say probably 90% of the time before they hang up, thank you very much Dr Brown, you've explained it. They might not agree with me, but I took the time to communicate with them. So I think that's something everybody, I don't care if you're a new professional, grad student, you're a VP, to be able to communicate and understand that that is one of the roles that we have as a student affairs professionals.

**Dr. Aaron Hughey:** I think that's absolutely right. I think we've gotten into this whole culture of everything is in a hurry. I'm always busy. Some of my colleagues, you know, when a prospective student asked about one of the counseling programs or other things, you know, sometimes they'll spend 10 minutes, they will refer them to the website. If you have any questions, let me know. They don't take the time to invite them in, have a 30-45, minute discussion, find out about who they are and experiences they've had, why they want to go into this field. This is not a pat me on the back thing, but people have told me over the years, the thing that really made up their mind to come here was the fact that I simply talked to them about things. I responded to them and I got to know them on a personal level and that meant a lot to them, particularly in this day and age, where everybody tends to feel like they're being processed and I do a lot of stuff with academic advising.

And it's the same type of thing where it's not just telling people what classes they need to take next semester. It's getting to know them, you know, that I always say the academic advisor because of the relationship they have with the students they serve. You know, they're one of the key people for retention and everything else. And so many people, you know, they get so overwhelmed with how much I've got to get done today. They really forget that whole relationship is gonna, that's the big picture, as far as I'm concerned.

**Stuart Brown:** Aaron, thank you for your one thing. I think it's a really good teachable moment for people to take that step to, not just always be cautious, but to realize communication is important. It's a two way street and that people appreciate when you do take the time to have that conversation.

**Dr. Aaron Hughey:** They do. Thanks for inviting me for this. I really appreciate it.

**Stuart Brown:** You've 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 developer of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most access websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you'll join me next time for another episode of the Student Affairs One Thing.

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