



**Podcast:** One Thing - New Professional

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**Summary:** We chat Amanda Anastasia Paniagua, a graduate research assistant in the Division of Diversity and Belonging at Bowling Green State University.

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**Stuart:** Welcome to Student Affairs One Thing - New Professional, a podcast that asks a simple question of new professionals in the field - what is one thing you have learned you feel will help you as you move forward in your 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 and a wide range of webinars.

On today's episode. I am very pleased to have Amanda Anastasia Paniagua graduate research assistant in the Division of Diversity and Belonging at Bowling Green State University. Welcome to the program.

**Amanda:** Thanks for having me.

**Stuart:** So Amanda, what is your one thing?

**Amanda:** My one thing is no job is worth your mental health and well being. So in 2018 I went into a diversity and belonging role just as I was finishing up my Master's in education. At the time, it was my dream job. I thought I would be able to create change from within, but quickly found myself up against a wall. I knew I wanted to eventually get my PhD with the hope of becoming a faculty member teaching, but I wanted to stay put where I was because I was really loving the students that I was serving at the time. This was exactly a month before the whole world was shut down from Covid 19, but I found myself home already with a sick nine month old and then would have to have an emergency procedure myself that required me staying home through March. By the time it came for me to go back to work, the country was already shut down and my employer told us all to stay home.

And at first I welcomed the chance to be home. I had a new family, first child. I was very excited. But as the days turned to weeks and weeks turned to months I developed postpartum depression. This combined with very little remote support from my work supervisor at the time forced me to really evaluate what it is I wanted for my future and my career. So I made the decision to pursue my PhD and left in October 2020 and it was the best decision I have ever made. My family and I were able to travel. We went out to St. Louis. We went to Costa Rica and I was able to reset and heal from the pandemic and work related trauma. What I thought was my dream job ended up being my worst nightmare. So my one thing is this - no job is worth your mental health and well being.

**Stuart:** When you talk about the mental health or you talk about the position, was it something where, let's say, there was no pandemic and other issues that you were facing, do you think that still would have been your quote unquote dream job or maybe I thought that but I wasn't realizing everything I had to put into it and maybe eventually it would have affected my mental well being?

**Amanda:** Oh absolutely. There are very personal details and work related details that I'm purposely leaving out of my story because I don't want to revisit that part of my life and my work life. I don't think it would have gotten better at the time and it was the best decision to leave. It just was not a good fit for the institution. And I especially, coming out of graduate studies having learned student development theory, understanding how institutions need to be open. That's at the heart of diversity and belonging work is that we hold up a mirror to institutions and say you're doing a disservice to your students and here's how or you're being inequitable to your faculty staff, here's how and unless folks are willing to hear that and willing to really listen, then we're talking past each other. And so I found it was just best for me to exit.

Just as an example, so when I came into the program, I was under the impression that it was going to train and prepare me to become a faculty member who taught in a higher education department. But as my first year went on, I found that it was very practitioner based, very like practice oriented, like going into administrative roles and higher ed, which is fine if that's what folks want to do, but that's not what I want from my future. So I had to start taking steps to figure out how do I position myself to have the job after these studies that I want. And so I started reading this book called *The Professor Is In* and it transformed my entire thinking and my mental health because I was finding myself falling back into that date like what's my purpose, what is this all for? I was feeling very discouraged, feeling like I wasn't going to achieve my goals. And I had left this job that I thought was also what I wanted.

**Stuart:** I think what a lot of people have not done until very recently is in that equation put in mental health, it's always well, where do I want to be in my career? That standard interview question, where do you see yourself in five years and what part of the field you want to go into? But also as you get into a position for some reason you're not thriving, you're not happy to look at some of those variables. But then also layer in the mental health thing, it might not be. But if that is the cause that even if it's maybe a good position, a good title, good salary. But if it's affecting your mental health, maybe it is time to reevaluate where you're at and where you're going?

**Amanda:** Absolutely. I mean, my husband was instrumental. He's the one that said, you need to get out of there. Like you, you just, I can tell you're not happy, it's not healthy for you. It's like, I know it's gonna be a struggle financially for us for a little while, but we'll figure it out. We always do. So that also is an important thing that you have to have a strong support structure around you, which I know not everyone has. I recognize that's a huge privilege having a partner who's financially stable that could keep us afloat while I transitioned into PhD studies. The other thing I want to say, a different frame of thinking, is that who will you be, what kind of person will you be in this role and how will this impact those around you? So if you're not finding that you like who you are in the mirror or you don't like the decisions you're making because I think a lot of the decisions I made while I was in that role where trauma responses because I was experiencing so many things that were really hurting me and hurting my soul, but I didn't have the moment to think and reflect and heal from it. So I was making decisions in crisis and trauma mode.

**Stuart:** Just one thing I would add to this if there's someone on the campus that you can speak with if you're having issues maybe around mental health. Because I think especially for newer professionals, you don't always know and there's always going to be stumbling blocks, learning hurdles and maybe not to, in a sense, jump ship right away because you might be able to ease things through and continue. So yes, mental health is important, but have someone there even just to bounce off ideas or your situation as part of the decision making process.

**Amanda:** Absolutely. And I think in terms of students, yes or young professionals right. Find out what your benefits are. Some benefit packages include free mental health services, like a hotline, you can call to talk to somebody who's outside the organization so it's a mutual third party. That's always helpful. Some institutions have an ombudsman or ombudsperson who will try to serve as a neutral third party to kind of hear your concerns and hear what's going on and help you make the best next decision for yourself.

**Stuart:** Amanda, I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. I think that is so important, especially in today's environment and like you pointed out, I think that's also incredibly important that there are resources in the community, on your campus. If you, especially, if you are on a unionized campus that might be in your contract, look for things before you just maybe make a decision that down the road you might regret because you didn't really fully think things through,

You've been listening to *Student Affairs One Thing - New Professional*, a podcast that asks a simple question of new professionals in the field - what is one thing you have learned, you feel will help you as you move forward in your career? My guest today has been Amanda Anastasia Paniagua, who is a graduate research assistant in the Division of Diversity and Belonging at Bowling Green State University. I'm your host, Stuart Brown, the developer of [StudentAffairs.com](http://StudentAffairs.com), one of the most accessed websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you'll join us again next time for another episode.