



Podcast: One Thing - New Professional

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Summary: We chat with Zain Olson, a Student Transition Coordinator, Undergraduate Program for the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota.

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

Stuart Brown: Welcome to the StudentAffairs 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 Zain Olson, a Student Transition Coordinator at the University of Minnesota, Welcome to the program, Zain.

Zain Olson: Hey, thanks for having me.

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

Zain Olson: My one thing is to trust that your future self will be able to handle whatever decisions that your current self makes.

Stuart Brown: It sounds very Back to the Future-ish. Can you elaborate on that?

Zain Olson: So, I first heard this piece of advice, probably one or two months into my new job at the University of Minnesota, as I was preparing to teach a class that we call design your life. And this class is all about teaching students to use design thinking in order to build a life that is aligned with their goals and their interests and their values. And one of the readings we have students do for this class comes from Afia Ofori-Mensa and she writes about the cycle of non regret and this cycle of non regret is basically like five steps you should follow in which to live your life without regret. And the fifth step is this piece of advice, trust that your future self will be able to handle whatever decisions your current self makes and as a new professional, this really spoke to me. I was only a couple months into my new job at the University of Minnesota and it would have been a little bit of a difficult transition meeting people and getting used to living in Minneapolis. But by and large, I felt really great about the decision that I made. I was having an impact at work, had a great supervisor, great coworkers. I was loving Minneapolis in the summertime, way better in the summer in the wintertime. But overall I felt really, really positive about the decision that I had made just a couple months prior when I was in my final semester at grad school and contrasting this feeling really good about this decision in grad school and that final semester, I was really, really worried about making the right choice with my career. I had three potential job offers in front of me, all of which would have been amazing opportunities, but I felt so much pressure to make the right decision between these three job offers and in retrospect, I realized any one of those could have been the right decision because they were all amazing opportunities, but I put so much pressure on myself, you know, tossing and turning, losing sleep, talking to anybody that would listen to me trying to figure out the best option.

But I realized looking back as I was reading this cycle of non regret article that I wasn't trusting that my future self would be able to make the best of whatever decision that my current self at the time in grad school made. And so really any of those could have been a great opportunity for me. But the thing is I just wasn't trusting myself. So going forward in my career, I just want to know and try to impart that upon the students I teach in my class and myself try to internalize this idea that no matter where my career goes or what decisions I might have to make about maybe taking a promotion somewhere, changing functional areas that I just need to trust in myself, that I'll be able to make the right decision and be able to thrive whenever I do at this point, I've made it through 100% of the bad days and bad decisions that I've made and grown and it's made me who I am. And so even if I don't feel like I can make the right decision in this moment, who's to say that the person six months

down the line with the experiences that I gain can't make the best of this decision. So it's something I try to impart upon my students and it's hard to know what life is going to be like, but just trusting that you'll be able to handle whatever life throws at you, I think is going to really help me in my career moving forward.

Stuart Brown: I think that's important because we're always second guessing or where you are a new professional, I am a retired professional and I can look back at my whole career and say, well, gee if I didn't do this or that, but I trusted myself and things, I'll say have worked out and it could have been in this direction or that direction. But I chose this one. And instead of looking back and thinking, woe is me, I should have done this to say, all right, let me look forward and proceed on that path. Because I guess in a sense, there's no reason to look back. I can't change the past. I can only change the future.

Zain Olson: Exactly.

Stuart Brown: Zain, you talked about the fifth and last part of these steps is live your life with no regret - Look forward. You have some of the other steps that people can listen to to see where they fit in that spectrum?

Zain Olson: Absolutely. I think the first step is actually make the best decision that you can with the information that you have at the time. And so that kind of speaks to what you were just talking about and that there's you can't look back. You know, living life with regret. You can't change the past. You can only change your path forward to the future. And so I think that first step really leans into that as well. There's also the second one is resist temptation to judge past you with the information that present you received after that decision was made. And so again, it just speaks to not living with regret because you can't change the past. The only thing you can change is the decision you make going forward.

Stuart Brown: Sounds like my golf game, where I go in and choose a club and then I say, no, I'm going to make a different decision and nine times out of 10 I should have stuck with the first club and not gone back and changed my mind. When you've talked to friends or colleagues in the field about this, what has been the reaction from people?

Zain Olson: It's hard to internalize. I think it's hard to trust ourselves. It's a pretty vulnerable thing because we feel like there is this one best option and certainly there's better decisions than others. But um, I think especially we're talking to students getting to buy in has been difficult, but I think once they do buy into this idea, it is great because regret sucks, nobody likes having regret in their life. And so if you can buy into this idea of not having regret following these five steps and you know, living just making decisions about the future, trusting that you'll be able to make the best of them. It's really freeing and liberating feeling that I think opens a lot of doors for you all.

Stuart Brown: What about some of your professional colleagues when you've talked about this with them, have they just sort of rolled their eyes and said, oh Zain, give me a break. I'm always regretting, how can I not do that?

Zain Olson: No, I'm lucky. I have a bunch of great colleagues and the whole idea of life design and design thinking we're really trying to embrace at the University of Minnesota and the Carlson School where I work. We actually took a recent seminar that was a week long life design training basically. And part of the discussion we had in there is this cycle of non regret and a lot of my coworkers haven't necessarily thought about it as much as I had because I'm the one teaching the class. But I think we all came away from this training and the readings and feeling really invigorated because it is a liberating feeling. I'm lucky that I'm in an institution and a college does a lot of buy in to this. I think like you said, it does seem a little back to the future and hard to embody sometimes depending on the people you're talking to. But at least in my perspective and my experience, I've been really lucky that I have great colleagues who also buy into this.

Stuart Brown: With so much discussion on college and university campuses, on mental health, it seems like this would be a great article for people to read, not that it's going to cure everybody and help everybody, but I think if they can internalize maybe some of the steps in that article and see that once you make that decision, go forward and don't just dwell on the path, sit in your room and just think of all the other possibilities that could have been done. Take that energy to move forward in your life.

Zain Olson: Yes, absolutely. Because like I said, I mean six months from now, there's six months of life you've experienced and skills you've gained and people you've met connections you've made and that will help you to make the best whatever decision that you have made and all the decisions you made in the past, they've made you who you are today for better or for worse. But I think even the bad decisions you make, you learn from those, you grow from those. And so I think especially with students in mental health and trying to figure out what is my path forward, like I said, like the, not the woe is me, but figuring out like what is my next step and being excited about that. Making that decision and feeling good about it, because hopefully you're able to trust yourself and that you'll make the best of whatever decisions you make.

Stuart Brown: In addition for career services, that's where students are going for that end of their academic career, that job and so many questions, like you said, you had three different possibilities. They all could have led in different directions and you chose one in and that is difficult for for students and maybe that should be something career services offices should offer students as they're starting that journey - read this article because it might help you make decisions and have a lot less sleepless nights.

Zain Olson: Absolutely. And I think that's why we have students take this design your life class and it really works in tandem with another class called Design Your Career as they work to use design thinking in their career and also their life, um and realize that we can't predict where life is going to take us, can't predict where your career is going to take you, but just embracing the change in the the ambiguity and not knowing what comes next. And like I said, trusting yourself and seeing what happens next and being excited about it.

Stuart Brown: Zain, I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. 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've learned, you feel will help you as you move forward in your career. My guest today has been Zain Olson, a Student Transition Coordinator at the University of Minnesota. I'm your host, Stuart Brown the developer of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most accessed websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you will join us next time for another episode.

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