



Podcast: One Thing - New Professional

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Summary: Host Stuart Brown chats with Amelia Kolb, Assistant Director of Leadership and Volunteerism at Western Kentucky University.

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

Stuart Brown: 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've 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 Amelia Kolb, Assistant Director of Leadership and Volunteerism at Western Kentucky University. Welcome to the program.

Amelia Kolb: Amelia, thank you. Happy to be here.

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

Amelia Kolb: My one thing that I would give is ignorance as an opportunity. So sort of what that means or what that can look like in the profession of student affairs and higher education or in life in general is when we approach things or when we encounter things in our lives that we might be completely ignorant of or not know about, we can choose to not move forward, not learn and kind of just say this is something I don't know. Or we can lean into that ignorance, recognize it and use it as an opportunity to learn something new to make ourselves better and to kind of continue developing our knowledge base, which I think in the profession of student affairs and higher education is really important as trends change as college life changes for students as well. So ignorance as an opportunity I would say is my one thing.

Stuart Brown: And is there a story behind that one thing?

Amelia Kolb: Yes. So I would say this is something I've been thinking about recently. I have a really good friend and he and I talk about just different things all the time. And there was one time where he said I would rather be ignorant about something because then that shows that there's something else that I could learn from it rather than know I know everything about this topic. And when I heard it, it kind of was a shock to me or it struck me as different because I had always correlated the word ignorance with something really negative. And so to see it in optimistic light, kind of changed the way that I saw the word ignorance. And then as kind of, I've continued working in the profession of student affairs, encounter students all the time who are afraid of being wrong or maybe afraid of trying new things. And so it's, that's something that I kind of talk about with students as well is that sure you might be wrong or you may not feel comfortable doing this thing. And so you could not do it or you could use it as an opportunity to learn something new. Maybe you're gonna get things wrong along the way. But it's something that I continue to see kind of pop up throughout my time working with students and with other professionals as well.

Stuart Brown: I think one of the things about students on a college campus is we like to say, we give them the opportunity to fail, to be ignorant so that they can learn before they go out to the, and I'm doing air quotes here, The Real World and sometimes that works. I was speaking with a more seasoned professional in another episode of this series and she was saying we want students to be able to fail unless there's a lot of money involved. You know, then we want to maybe swoop in and help them out. But if it's going to be an event that they're ignorant of how to put it on, well, this is where you're going to learn. We don't expect them to know everything right off the bat.

Amelia Kolb: Yeah, I think you hit on something really good there and in the sense of not only using his ignorance as an opportunity but also having us a place to fail because of course, in our professional lives, there's some failures that are hard to come back from. But there's also times where we fail regularly. But if we use that again as an opportunity, then it's something where we can use it to do better in the future. So I think that part of having that space to fail is really important as well.

Stuart Brown: And I think that's very important for supervisors of, let's say, students, undergraduates. Let those individuals know you can fail. I mean, not to come right out and say I expect you to fail or it's ok to fail. But that they know they have that wiggle room because, again, this is a laboratory for them to branch out. What are they interested in? Maybe I'm interested in pursuing this area. No, I'm not interested. Maybe I want to take chemistry. Wow, I love chemistry. I never thought I'd love chemistry. So in so many different aspects of higher education, having the students know that they have that space to be ignorant, but to use that as a challenge to them.

Amelia Kolb: Kind of reminds me, I was talking to another newer professional in the field and she's actually in a graduate, a master's graduate program for student affairs and higher education. But she also just took on new full time role. And I was talking with her about some of the challenges that she's faced up to this point in the position. And one thing that she mentioned to me was that with some of the new things that she's learning, she was afraid to ask questions about it because she was afraid of being wrong. And so we talked through it a little bit and it kind of returning back to the original one thing is that I told her, you can use this as an opportunity and also knowing her supervisor, you do have that safe space to fail as well. So this young professional, we kind of recapped and discussed maybe ways that she could approach this. The things that she may be ignorant of or the things that she wants to learn or the things that she's afraid of failing by being proactive and asking these questions and talking with their supervisor about the, the fear itself of being wrong or doing things incorrectly being a new professional. So that supervisor piece I think is really important as well.

Stuart Brown: What you're saying almost sounds like a graduate seminar where you meet once a week and you process what everyone's doing on their internships and to support one another to help one another. So maybe if individuals are listening to this and they work at a large enough campus, that's something they should do. Recruit individuals have lunch once a week and really sort of hash through what's going on to help people. Because what you're saying that you advised that new professional of is, is very important. No one wants to fail. No one wants to be ignorant. They don't want to show their supervisor, they can't hack it. But that's ok. But there's that dialogue, there's that communication that you have to have in order for everybody to feel comfortable.

Amelia Kolb: And I would just add on that even if it can't be something formal where it's ok, we're gonna meet once a week and get lunch, it could be something as simple as a check in with a newer professional or someone who's just new to a position in general and say, hey, how are you doing with this? What do you not know? What do you have questions about in opening up a space for, for ignorance to be kind of spread uh within the conversation? So that maybe that newer professional doesn't have to feel afraid to, to show their ignorance to their supervisor.

Stuart Brown: Amelia, I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. I think it's something that can sound very daunting, but it's something that should be embraced as individuals move through their professional career.

You have 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 Amelia Kolb, Assistant Director of Leadership and Volunteer tourism at Western Kentucky University. 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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