



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with We chat with Dr. Leon McClinton, Director of Housing at Oklahoma State University and V.P. of ACUHO-I.

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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 one thing you have learned that has helped shape your professional career? I'm your host Stuart Brown, the 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 NSLS delivers guaranteed student engagement, increased student retention and is financially self-sustainability. Learn more at NSLS.org

On today's episode. I am very pleased to have Dr. Leon McClinton, Director of Housing and Residential Life at Oklahoma State University. Dr. McClinton is also a Vice President for the Association of College and University Housing Officers International. Welcome to the program.

Dr. Leon McClinton: Thank you Stuart for having me. I'm very honored and excited to talk to you about my one thing.

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

Dr. Leon McClinton: Well, my one thing Stuart, as I reflect on my career, I feel as if I've never worked a day in my life and the reason I say that is I truly enjoy working with students. I love to see students develop and grow while they're in college. I love for them to attain leadership positions and develop those skills and prepare themselves for life after college. And you know as I think about why I'm so passionate with that, I think about my time as an undergraduate student.

Yes I have three degrees and my doctorate in philosophy and education leadership from Clemson University. All three of my degrees are from Clemson, But I started out not doing so well actually to the point where I was academically suspended after my first year, made a 1.0 the first semester and a 1.6 the second semester. And I did well in high school, have two parents who were teachers. So I understood the importance of education and started out college being very shy, very timid, thought the environment was too large for me and just got kind of lost in the crowd. Thankfully, I had parents that were able to get me back in my second year.

During that summer, after my first year, I took a lot of classes where I can make A's to get my GPA up. First and second year in college, I lived with the RA. And the RA during my second year says Leon you're always here, you're engaging with my residents, why don't you consider being an RA? I said you know what I think I would love to do that. And I asked, well, how do you become an RA? He says, you have to interview to be RA.

And at that time in my life and where I was developmentally, I thought that was the absolutely most terrifying thing any student could go through and decided I'm not going to interview for any type of student leadership role. So I come back my junior year and the graduate student overseeing the RAs just stopped by my apartment, says your roommate, the RA, is not coming back, would you be interested in the job? And I said, absolutely. And he said, well I have to make a few phone calls and I'll be back. I'll be back in touch with you in a few days.

He came back with the staff T Shirt and said, Leon you have the staff T-Shirt if you accept the job. And I felt like I was the happiest guy on the planet when I got that job. I remember my first weekend on duty and there

was a party down the hill from my apartment. I got a call there's a large group of students. You need to go deal with it. I put on my name tag, my clipboard and got an incident report form and I felt like I was the most important person on that campus at that moment.

But I tell that story because at that moment I felt like I had a sense of belonging at the university and when I see students that may struggle or that may have some of those similar challenges as they start their collegiate life, I really want to try to help them overcome those obstacles and find ways to help them be comfortable, find their place within their residential setting. Love working in housing as I shared with so many parents during new student orientation sessions, is that some students don't want to go too far from where they live in order to get involved and we have so many ways within our residential community for students to get involved. We have a residence hall association, we have front desk positions that are available. There's so many stories, I know we don't have a lot of time Stuart, but you know, I can think of some stories where I've seen students flourish. I've had a student worker years ago that worked in our office. And she was very quiet, but I know she observed me through the years as I came to work and 15, 20 years later she is very established in our field. Even has a higher position in housing than I do and, so you know, I've been thinking, I've been fortunate to be recognized and received many accolades such as also serving in a leadership role in a ACUHO-I right now. But there's nothing more rewarding to me, then seeing a student, or a former student, be successful and realizing when that student started out in college maybe was a little bit uncomfortable, a little bit shy, but now has turned into a tremendous leader.

Stuart Brown: I think all of us in the field have had a lot of stories like that. Or where we see students with potential and some of these students just come out of the woodwork. So it's not necessarily those students that may be self-identify from day one, it's those students that come to you or you see them and you just give them that chance and all of a sudden they are Mr. or Mrs. student leader and they're doing this, they're doing that and all it took was an interest by a senior student affairs person.

Even down to, like you said, the RA. I mean that RA recognized something in you and is giving you that nudge.

Dr. Leon McClinton: Stuart, you're right on it. I think I have another example, quick example, that support or illustrates what you just said. This was pretty recent. About a few years ago I went to a basketball game and I was with our students that were involved in the residence hall association and there was a first year student, male students, that I tried to strike up a conversation with and that student just was not willing to talk to me, just extremely timid, kept his distance from me.

And so this past fall semester, this particular student that I'm talking about now is the RHA President. So has grown three years later, leading this association and then he heard that I wanted to have a podcast due to the pandemic we're not gonna have a lot of student face to face interaction. So I want to have a podcast and interview student every other week throughout the fall semester and he sought me out and me could I co-host this podcast with you?

And so as we did these interviews, you know, every other week. It's almost like I didn't need to be there. I mean he was so vocal, very comfortable, just a natural, so again, just so rewarding to see, so rewarding to see this student grow during his time here.

Stuart Brown: So I guess what I'm looking at is that that one thing for people that are listening, whether undergrads, grads, new professionals on up is really to realize that you do have an impact. It might not be an impact that you see right away, but it might take a semester a couple of years or like that example you gave, 20 years later that former student is not your boss, but you know, she's up there in in the ranks. That's something that we don't always know about, but something that we should be reaching out to these students because like I said before, they might just need that one little bit of interest to spark their career maybe.

Dr. Leon McClinton: Absolutely, absolutely. And, again as I, reflect on my career, I feel like, you know, when I talk to people that are interested in pursuing a career in student affairs. Make sure that you truly care about students. If you care about students you want to help them be successful, then you'll be like me and feel like you know what, I'm really not working. I feel like I'm not working at this, this is a lot of fun and I'm just giving back.

Stuart Brown: Leon, thank you so much for sharing your one thing. I think this is something that people can take away and really, sort of, ingrained in their professional career to be not necessarily looking out for people, but to be aware that we have the impact on these undergraduates.

I want to thank Dr. Leon McClinton, Director of Housing and Residential Life at Oklahoma State University. Also Vice president at the Association of College and University Housing Officers International. 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 access websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you will join us next time for another episode of Student Affairs One Thing.

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