



**Podcast:** Student Affairs One Thing

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**Summary:** We chat with Dr. Adam Peck, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs at Illinois State University.

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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 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. Adam Peck. Adam is currently the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs at Illinois State University. He previously served as Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students at Stephen F. Austin State University. He is also the co-author and editor of Engagement and Employability and the soon to be released, Applying Design Thinking to the Measurement of Experiential Learning. Welcome to the program Adam.

**Dr. Adam Peck:** Thank you Stu.

**Stuart Brown:** So, Adam, What is your one thing?

**Dr. Adam Peck:** You know, I think if there's a thread that has gone all the way through my career from beginning to end and so I've had the chance to take a look at it in sort of its fullness and think about it, It's mentorship. I think early on in our careers we know that we need mentors, we need people who are helping us make sense of things as we go. But I would say that the one thing that I can see more clearly now than I could have at any other point in my career was that the most significant mentors that one will have in their career are generally the people who are navigating the same stage that you are. I think we have a tendency to think of a mentor as somebody who's hindsight can be your foresight, you know, someone who's got a little bit more seasoning and maybe a bit more wisdom and those are really important mentors too. But what I've discovered over time is that I've assembled and curated this collection of people that all play an important role in my life. I've got a friend who is a champion, they think that I hung the moon.

And so when I need a little bit of a build-up or when I face a disappointment and I think I'm not deserving of whatever good thing I wanted to see happen to me, I give this person a call. I say I got nominated for this award and I didn't win it and they'll say that's a travesty. That's the worst thing I've ever heard. We should write your congressman, you know, and I need that. And then I've got a friend that I trust implicitly to be unfailingly honest with me. I go, hey, I feel like this is the case, am I the one who's doing something wrong here and this friend can say to me, you know, I've looked at it objectively and I don't think you are. And then it means the world to me because I know that's true and sometimes I've empowered them to say, you know, I think you might be onto something there, you might be the reason for this. And with that particular friend, I always think of this quote from Tim Elmore who said you have to build a bridge of trust that can handle the weight of truth and the two of us have done that together and we are that for each other. So those mentorship relationships have sustained me in times of incredible challenge.

**Stuart Brown:** Let me ask if in your, in the early part of your career, was there something that you observed that in this sort of mentoring relationship that maybe a supervisor who had a mentor or a supervisor who said to you either implicitly or explicitly, hey Adam, as you go along in this field, you really need to have something

**Dr. Adam Peck:** You know, it's funny, you should put it that way because it's really quite the opposite. It's that I never really felt like I was connecting with mentors and I remember, you know, having taught graduate students for quite a few years when I was watching those students navigate their first jobs, they were often surprised and disappointed that their supervisor wasn't being a mentor to them. And that's when I realized that

that's kind of rare. It's kind of rare to have a supervisor who really looks at you and says, I see potential in you, I want to help you develop into all of that potential. When that happens, that's magic. That's absolute magic, but it hadn't really happened for me. And so I also noticed that a lot of the people that I met maybe who were in top graduate programs, they got to work alongside some of the pantheon of student affairs folks. And at that point in my career, I wasn't really exposed to a lot of those folks and maybe I looked on that with a little bit of jealousy. So I would, I would say that maybe at first I thought I was doing something unique. If I can't get some big name to endorse me and if I can't find a supervisor who is really a mentor to me, then maybe I'm going to have to construct this myself and I'm going to make it out of the thing that I have, which is relationships with people. But then the more I've talked to other people about it, we realized that we had really believed that that sort of fallacy that your mentor had to be somebody with more experience than you. And that really the way that it most often happened was the relationships with your careers.

**Stuart Brown:** So in a way, looking back at your career, because this mentoring concept, however you wanted to phrase it, wasn't really there for you. So it's almost that you took the reins on your own to develop these mentoring relationships. So I guess if people listening to this podcast are going to take something away, it's, it's okay at the beginning maybe not to have these mentoring relationships. However, as you move throughout the field, it is something to develop for just the reasons that you stated.

**Dr. Adam Peck:** Yeah, I think for me, the takeaway would really be that don't force it. I mean to be honest, that could be its own podcast right there. Just don't force it. I always felt like I had a motor and I wanted to improve and I wanted to, I had goals for my career and if you would have said to me at age 28 hey, we think you're ready to be a vice president. I would have been like, yeah, of course having 28 I've got a half a master's degree, let's do this thing, you know, and I would have never occurred to me that I just wasn't ready for that. And so I would tend to find that if I had a chance to meet somebody who was in a senior student affairs officer position or if I had met a college president, I don't remember how many of those I met, I was always thinking like, okay, how can I leverage this relationship? And it was just not organic? And it probably weirded them out to, you know, what I mean? I think we always remember ourselves through a funhouse mirror, so it probably wasn't nearly that bad, but that's really true and I would also hate to like if anybody who'd ever supervised me was listening to this, I had some good mentors along the way, but to put them in this position where like they're the mentor that just never felt right. I also too, I learned a lot from mentoring other people because I think because I didn't necessarily have that experience, I really kind of hungered to be that mentor that I thought that people needed. And in some cases I have formed relationships with professionals that are meaningful to me, perhaps more so than any mentor I ever had and they have no idea how much I have learned from them. So you know that being a mentor part is really important too.

**Stuart Brown:** Well, Adam, thank you for sharing your one thing story. I think for individuals in student affairs listening, that this is something that they can take with them as they again move along the timeline with their profession, sort of a very teachable moment. And I think you know, especially the way you're describing this is that it is important that you don't necessarily have to be out there alone navigating the treacherous waters or the sometimes treacherous waters of the field of student affairs as it gets just more and more complicated.

I want to thank Dr. Adam Peck for sharing his one thing. 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 accessed websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you will join us next time for another episode of the Student Affairs One Thing.

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