



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Kenn Elmore, Associate Provost and Dean of Students, Boston 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, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned student affairs professionals - what is one thing you have learned that has helped shaped your professional career? I'm your host Stuart Brown, 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.

On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Dr. Kenn Elmore. He is the Associate Provost and Dean of Students at Boston University. He has been at BU since 2003. He has been named a pillar of the profession by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. He is also a diamond honoree from the American College Personnel Association. Welcome to the program, Kenn.

Dr. Kenn Elmore: Thanks for having me Stuart. I appreciate it.

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

Dr. Kenn Elmore: My one thing is love and I say love in this way. You know, it's that thing that I've worked on and have seen over the years and it's love from the standpoint of an unconditional regard for human beings. I think that's one of those things that you've got to be able to have to do this kind of work. It also, I think, encompasses this notion that you have got to envision yourself in other people's worlds and other people's perspectives. That's an essential part of it. And I think the other piece about love is that it is about this sort of enjoyment and joy and delight and incredible spirit. And that all goes into it, incredible spirit, envisioning other people's lives, an unconditional regard for human beings. That's how you do the work.

Stuart Brown: Is there some episode in your professional career where you came to this realization that love is the one thing?

Dr. Kenn Elmore: Yeah. You know, I think I unfortunately have seen it around death when you are dealing with a student's death. And what you will see is that you come to know that student a lot more than you ever would have, and that's the real shame of it. If they were in front of you, if they were someone you had met, you see the love and the outpouring, the regard that people have as family and friends. You see, and you must see their life. You've got to get into their shoes, you don't get in their family shoes. That's an important piece to it. And then ultimately, you see all the joy that they brought to the people around them. I think that's one way that I see it. But I think the way that I really discovered love was one commencement day. I have this thing where I will walk from one end of campus to the other as we're preparing for this massive commencement ceremony with about 30,000 people at it and to just watch and look and observe and to say, wow, I'm hearing people and their languages and the way they talk from all over the world. I am seeing the way that people dress and they and everything that goes with that. I am seeing these fights and squabbles that happened. But I'm also seeing incredible pride. That's human being stuff and to think, at least in my world, and especially for that student who was like me, a poor person who went to college knowing full well that their lives are changed. Knowing full well that they will change lives. That just strikes me as the ultimate embodiment of love and to be able to. And I know when I walk that is where I feel it the most. Where I say, well, here we go. This is about incredible regard for these human beings. This is about envisioning where they've been and where they'll go. And then to just see absolute joy. For me, that's where I said, I must, the first thing you must do is love the environment, but you must love your students.

Stuart Brown: You think there's enough love on college campuses and maybe especially from, let's say, high level student affairs professionals.

Dr. Kenn Elmore: I think the love is there. We just don't realize it. The love is there and it, I think permeates everything that we do. We just don't take the time to stop and see it. We don't take the time to stop and incorporate it into what we do. I think we're afraid of love and we're afraid of using the term love, because it's got such a connotation, especially nowadays, in terms of what that means. Obviously, I'm not talking about romantic love, that's something so certainly different. And so I think the love is there, we've just got to stop and see it.

Stuart Brown: It seems that it's something like you have to trust yourself to have that love, to embrace that love. So what would you say to new professionals, mid-level professionals that might be listening to this podcast about maybe taking hold of love?

Dr. Kenn Elmore: Wow! Well said Stuart. Why I think you gave the answer right there. Taking hold of love means you've got to take hold of the love for yourself, first and foremost. And I don't think we do that. We are people who typically don't accept help. We are folks who charge ahead. We are focused and we forget that we also have to be about that real deep self-examination and understanding where this love fits into our own lives for us ourselves. You know, let love be this selfish way that you do your work. I think it would be helpful. That's what I would say.

Stuart Brown: Kenn, thank you so much for sharing this one thing. It really resonates with me and I hope people listening, sit back and say, you know what I have to be like Dr. Kenn Elmore and embrace that love. And I think that really is something that is so simple, but then again, it's simple to overlook.

Dr. Kenn Elmore: Well, you know, the other thing to Stuart. Love is messy. Right? If love were embodied in a person, love's going to be your messy friend right there. They're gonna be these paradoxes and they're gonna be all these things that just are hard about being with them and at the same time you want to be around them. At the same time, they extend this grace to you. So love is messy too. And so I warned, I forewarn you, you will step into the messy side of yourself and it should be beautiful.

Stuart Brown: We're going to leave it at that. Kenn, thank you again for sharing your one thing.

You have been listening to the Student Affairs. One Thing podcast. My guest today has been Associate Provost and Dean of Students at Boston University. My name is Stuart Brown from the website StudentAffairs.com. I've been your host. I hope you will join me again for our next episode of Student affairs One Thing.

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