



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Kristie Orr, Director of Disability Resources at Texas A&M 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. Kristie Orr, Director of Disability Resources at Texas A&M University. She is also at the past president of the Association on Higher Education and Disability.

So, Kristie what is your one thing?

Dr. Kristie Orr: The thing that I think really stood out to me the most was the fact that I do not have to be an expert in all things. So I think when I first came into a leadership role, I have a lot of pressure on myself that I needed to know everything about everything and because I work in the field of disability that everything is very vast and very wide and very detailed. And I really thought at first that I needed to know everything.

Stuart Brown: And was there something within your professional career that sparked that understanding that maybe I don't have to be an expert on anything?

Dr. Kristie Orr: I think there are several things but the one that really stands out the most was a few years after I became a director, I was presenting with a colleague. And that colleague is very smart, very wise and very well read and someone who we laughed because when we presented together he would have 100 slides and I would have about 10 slides. So we had a very different style of presenting and talking and at first I was really intimidated and it wasn't that he knew everything, but it was just that he seemed very scholarly and that really wasn't my way.

And what I realized with that experience was that we both brought different things to the table. So he brought a lot of book learning and a lot of knowledge and I brought more of that personal touch and sometimes a little bit of laughter that needs to be done in a two day pre-conference before a conference. I think just that relationship, he's very smart but also can sometimes seem very serious. Most people would not describe me as being serious, although I do know a lot, I am smart and I recognize that at the same time I think I would bring a little levity and a little bit of, kind of that personal stories.

Also, I think it helped with our participants to know that I didn't know everything and they were not expected to know everything. So when you come into the field of disability, especially someone who is a one or two person office, they feel a lot of pressure to have to know all the things and everyone on some campuses go to that one office to get all of their information. And I think by being able to hear me say, I don't know everything and here's what I do with the fact that I don't know everything, which is I developed my network.

And I talked to those people and I may not be an expert in technology, but I have learned who those people are and I can reach out to those people and say, hey, here's my question, can you help me out or for someone who is working with people who are deaf and hard of hearing, that's not my area of expertise, but I can reach out to those people and I can make that connection. So I think by really looking at what is my role, what do I need to know and then what is it that I can have other people know and I can have them be the experts.

I think also it helps I have a bigger staff on my campus because we're a very large campus and I have been able to have my staff members be experts in different areas and so that helps them to grow. So they know I

don't know everything, but they know that I can turn to them and say, hey, can you help me with this? And I think for a younger professional that's really important to know that somebody else sees their value and their expertise and ask them for assistance.

Stuart Brown: I also think that it's good for individuals to know what their strengths are and to, like you said, work with others in either helping them develop their strengths or letting them know these are the players out there that you can rely on. I think in student affairs we really do talk about collaboration, collegiality and by everyone not so much knowing their place, but by each person knowing that they can rely on someone or go to someone. And I think something you also said about networking where you can find those people and they don't even have to be on your campus, but to have that network out there. So when you do need some expertise that you don't have, you know who to reach out to.

Dr. Kristie Orr: Absolutely. And I think that student affairs, especially like you said, it's very collegial. I know I have reached out to people at other campuses that I didn't even know and just asked a question and as long as it was something pretty simple, pretty short, I'm not asking them to provide me with, you know, hours worth of information, they're very happy to respond. And I feel the same way, I think you don't have to be intimidated asking someone else in your field a question because we see it as a compliment. If someone asked me a question, I think, oh they must think I know what I'm doing and I'm happy to share because we all want each other to be successful. I mean, I think everyone in student affairs want students to be successful, which means we need our staff to be successful in providing that support.

Stuart Brown: I think something you also said right at the beginning with that person that you are presenting with. That maybe this person was a little intimidating. Is that people have to also realize they know what they're talking about and it can be intimidating, but two different approaches and maybe this person with 100 slides. Well it's very easy to have 100 slides because I don't have to do a lot of work. I can just read my slides if I have 10 slides, I have to interact more. So, in a sense, I have to know more, because I'm not relying on dozens and dozens of slides to fall back on. So I think it's also recognizing what your strengths are. And like you said, your strengths are maybe more the personality, working more comfortably with people, that collegiality and that's another thing, you could say, another strength that you have that people might not always feel comfortable with at the beginning.

Dr. Kristie Orr: Yeah, I love that. I am a firm believer in strengths, whether it's with a capital S or just knowing that we all have strengths and that they're different and how much we can appreciate each other's strengths. And like you said, what I bring to the table is different than what somebody else brings to the table and together we can do really great things. So I don't need to look like every other, you know, leader. When I became the president of AHEAD, the person who was the president before me, so the past president, had a very different style than I did and was fantastic, and I learned so much from that person.

And so again, I was a little bit intimidated because I thought I'm not like that person. That person was just so eloquent and how they spoke and I'm, you know, live in Texas, I just say whatever, I pretty much say and I don't worry about it. But it doesn't always sound the most eloquent and then I realized that that's part of why I was the new president, was just people like my style too. They had a great style and then they also like my style. That they felt like I was someone who was approachable and who you could talk to. So both styles are equally important and equally great, but I need to be able to live in my style and my strength because if I'm going to try to do exactly what someone else did, it's just not going to work for me.

Stuart Brown: I think those, a couple of things you said, just as takeaways, especially for graduate students, new professionals, is that your style is your style and you don't have to change it to suit someone else. And then, also, the networking. Being comfortable in what you are an expert in. I would also say there are times when you might want to become an expert or you are asked to become an expert, but then to take the time to do that. But then also to be open. Let people know I am here for you. What you need I can supply or maybe I can help you find what you're looking for.

Dr. Kristie Orr: Yeah. And I love what you said about deciding what you want to be an expert in and even if you don't want to be an expert in something. But continuing that learning because that is one of the other things I thought of was, oh, one of my big takeaways is that whole lifelong learning and I gave an example earlier of technology, not a big technology person. I don't know a lot about accessible documents and things

like that. But I have really been trying the last few years to learn more about that because it is something that I can learn. And if I'm asking other people in my campus to learn about it, then why can't I learn about it too? So I think it's important not to hide behind the fact that maybe that's not gonna come naturally to me, it's not gonna be my strength. But that doesn't mean that I can't learn and grow in that area. And I think that's something that's really important to.

I would say probably 23 years ago when I started in this field, I was not a public speaker. Maybe I could do it a little bit, but now you know that I can do that and I love doing that and I actually get a lot of pleasure out of doing that. And I think that's an area maybe 23 years ago, I would have said, oh no, I don't really like public speaking, I don't want to do that. So don't limit yourself by what you think your strengths are, grow those, but also don't be afraid to try some things and maybe you might fall sometimes, definitely done that, but other times you might grow and turn out to be, that really is the strength you just didn't know you had.

Stuart Brown: Kristie, thank you for sharing your one thing. I think this is really important, especially as individuals go through the field, changing careers, changing positions as they get more seasoned to understand that.

Dr. Kristie Orr: Absolutely, thank you so much.

Stuart Brown: I have been speaking with Dr. Kristie Orr, Director of Disability Resources at Texas A&M University. You have been listening 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 shape your professional career. I've been 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 of Student Affairs.One Thing.

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