



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Pam Schreiber, Associate Vice President for Student Life and Executive Director of Housing and Food Services at the University of Washington.

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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. Pam Schreiber. She is currently the Associate Vice President for Student Life and Executive Director of Housing and Food Services at the University of Washington. She was previously the Director of University Housing at Florida Gulf Coast University and she is currently the President of the Association of College and University Housing Officers International. Welcome to the program Pam.

Dr. Pam Schreiber: Thank you so much Stuart.

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

Dr. Pam Schreiber: Well, I'm excited about this conversation and I it could potentially be a bit provocative before we get through the story. So, my one thing is politics is not a four letter word. So, my story here behind this is goes way back, many years. I've been in the field for a long time and this was one of the early opportunities for me to learn about something that has in fact impacted my career quite a bit. So, I had the opportunity to attend a professional development session. It was being offered by Pat Carney who at the time worked at UC Davis. Very experienced, astute, higher ed administrator. So Pat was doing a session on higher ed politics and I was really excited because I thought, all right, I'm going to learn how to stay out of this mess, how not to get in the middle of it. This is going to be great. And Pat started off her session by really saying exactly that politics is not a four letter word. She went on to define politics as simply people with goals who are working hard to accomplish those goals. And she talked about employing behaviors like negotiating and compromising and relationship building and positioning yourself so that you can accomplish your goals. And I started thinking, well that's interesting because that sounds pretty positive. Pat acknowledged that there are people who behave poorly, they negotiate in bad faith, they don't compromise, they try to manipulate. So she drew this distinction between engaging in these behaviors as a way to accomplish your goals, between doing that in a positive way and, of course, doing it in a negative way. And I think that we so often associate the concept of playing politics with only the bad behaviors. So I started to think about my work and certainly throughout my career as my work became more and more complicated and my goals were harder and harder to achieve. I started to think about that and how I could come to understand other's goals. Where do our goals match up? Where might be the opportunity for compromise or negotiation, so everybody can accomplish what they're trying to accomplish in their work. So it's just been, it just was one of those aha moments early enough in my career that I've been able to utilize that learning and be successful in many instances by kind of applying Pat's definition.

Stuart Brown: Was there a moment or a specific example during your career where you took what she said and applied it and, let's say whatever, negotiations or working with upper level administrators, students housing officers?

Dr. Pam Schreiber: You know, Stuart, there's so many examples and I, and you know, you just in your list, I mean, I've had these experiences with students, particularly when students feel very, very passionate and they come at you with, you know, really strong feelings and it may be natural to get into that and see it as opposition

if you will, but if you can listen about what they're trying to accomplish, what are their goals, right? What are they trying to accomplish and just think about what are, what are your goals or what are the things you might be able to offer I've certainly been engaged in that with colleagues across campus because there's a perception that housing programs always have a lot of money. Right? And so we have a lot to give or we have a lot of resources. So we have a lot to give up and you know, there are resources. Oftentimes that housing programs have that others don't, for example, space. And so sometimes it's as simple as collaborating on sharing space or giving up some space so that another entity or organization can accomplish their goals and you can get something out of that as well that benefits your students.

Stuart Brown: It seems that in today's world, that there isn't really a lot of that, that it's almost it's always going to be confrontational as opposed to a simple conversation or let's get together, let's talk about our needs, our goals and see if we can come into the middle. I think maybe not at your level, but maybe at mid-level or even lower where people think demands are put on them. You have to do this, you have to do that. And sometimes we step back and go, why couldn't we just have a discussion about this? So everyone could be happy.

Dr. Pam Schreiber: Oh, clearly. Clearly. And, you know, I was talking to a colleague recently who said, I wish I could take credit for this, but she said, you know, there's a fine line between passion and drama and I think that that's really true. And so I think we shouldn't mistake passion, you know, for maybe folks being inflexible or unwilling to negotiate. So, yeah, and it takes a lot of energy to focus in that way because again, human nature is to sort of say, well, if there's a demand on me, then, you know, I need to push back in in some fashion. So I think you're right. I also think the word politics and certainly politicizing, right, is now being used and applied to things and it is considered negative when someone says X, Y, Z is being politicized, and I understand what is meant by that. So that's why I said, maybe this conversation might be a little provocative, but I think listeners will get the gist of of what Pat intended.

Stuart Brown: It's too bad you didn't record her presentation because, again, in today's world it seems like that would be a basic course, maybe not even just for college campuses, but for people everywhere, because as you were describing, what she's, what she was saying, I'm thinking, look at today, where people aren't doing anything. It's almost sort of her presentation, people only taking the dark side, they're not looking at the positive. And when you look at the positive, it's a win-win for everybody. And sometimes you just shake your head. And I think, why can't people just do this because then everybody's happy and everyone will be on the same page, the same goal.

Dr. Pam Schreiber: Oh, exactly. You know, indeed, I think when you look at it as a zero sum game, that's when there's unfortunately so much loss around what could, what could have been.

Stuart Brown: And I think this is something for, let's say, I always like to say on these episodes, grad students or new professionals for them to look at it because, maybe unfortunately, they're coming up in a system where politics have been so negative, where maybe you and I look at politics where it is the art of compromise. I know in my career you pick up the phone, you talk to someone, hey, can we get together even over coffee and you find that you have a lot of common ground and you have a lot of the same goals. It's just for whatever reason, either individually or because of the surrounding atmosphere, there was that conflict that really didn't need to be there.

Dr. Pam Schreiber: Yeah, indeed, and you know, you mentioned the importance of spending time together and listening, right, asking great questions and listening. You know, what's important to you, what are you trying to accomplish and just investing in those kinds of interactions and developing those relationships before you need them. As the saying goes, that's really key to this process, I think.

Stuart Brown: Pam, I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. I think it is so important, especially someone like yourself, who has been in the field for a long time, for others to hear that, that this is the way you actually can operate on a college campus for everyone to feel empowered and that sometimes is just not there.

Dr. Pam Schreiber: My pleasure to share this experience.

Stuart Brown: You've 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? My guest today has been Dr. Pam Schreiber, currently the Associate Vice President for Student Life and the Executive Director of Housing and Food Services at the University of Washington. I've been your host, Stuart Brown, the developer of StudentAffairs.com. I hope you will join us again next time for another episode of the Student Affairs One Thing.

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