



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Leanna Fenneberg, Vice President for Student Affairs at Rider 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 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 and a wide range of webinars. I would like to thank our sponsor Alcohol101 plus, a cost free digital alcohol education program developed by Responsibilit.org. Designed to be used by colleges and universities, the course includes interactive and quick paced programming covering core alcohol education topics through an administrative dashboard. The program contains tools for institutions to easily roster students, track progress and analyze student metrics. To learn more about Alcohol101+, visit <https://www.alcohol101.plus>.

On today's episode. I am very pleased to have Dr. Leanna Fenneberg, Vice President for Student Affairs at Rider University. Welcome to the program.

Dr. Leanna Fenneberg: Thanks so much. Glad to be here.

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

Dr. Leanna Fenneberg: Stuart, my one thing today is, it's all about relationships. So, we each have so many insights and lessons learned in our professional lives. But as I reflect on one that is most important to me in my own intrinsic gratification, my professional success and the ability to advance goals on the campus and in the work we do. Relationships with others is certainly at the core and when I think about and talk about relationships, it's at different levels and with different constituents, including my team, campus partners, students, professional colleagues in the field etcetera. I remember my first professional conference and job search after grad school and all of the buzz around the advice was the importance of networking and that word felt so insincere to me. I had an aversion to that word, but once you know, you're in the field and you can shed the negative reaction to the perceived inauthenticity of that word, networking, you can really get to the core which is relationships and relationships can be and should be genuine and connected, authentic and are central to all that we do. So, for me, it's all about relationships, it's about investing in people. When you think about our strongest relationships in life, whether it's in our personal lives, our professional lives, there are common characteristics of things that keep relationships strong for me including things like spending meaningful time together, pursuing common goals or having shared values, maintaining trust, facilitating ongoing communication and hopefully laughter? Right? Lots of laughter. So, I think it's professionally important that we reflect upon and invest our energy in maintaining these kind of positive relationships.

Stuart Brown: Was there a point in the early part of your career where you had sort of an epiphany that said this is important? I can't be an island unto myself. I need to develop relationships whether that was in maybe grad school or in your first jobs in the field?

Dr. Leanna Fenneberg: So many reflections about that, both on my campus and in the professional network. But I will say professionally, my involvement in NASPA has been really pivotal to my own sense of connection within the field and sense of community. And so putting myself out there and being involved, in my case, it was through the NASPA knowledge communities and then building those authentic, meaningful and productive professional relationships that decades later I'm still connected with and referencing and doing good work with and connecting with personally as well has been really important and meaningful to me and to our work in the field. And so I think that professional involvement and volunteerism in the association, in any association is a really meaningful part of that.

Stuart Brown: What I think is important about what you're saying is, let's say if you're a new professional, you're just getting your feet wet the field, is to reach out that with all the professional associations. So whatever professional association you have, you have what they're called SIGS, knowledge communities, these are the people that might share similar interests that you can begin to develop relationships and it doesn't have to be, I'm starting at the national level, it can be at the regional level. I know when I first got into the field and I moved to Connecticut, I reached out to the regional Vice President, actually I think it was the Connecticut President of NASPA, she got me involved with the Region One board and I stayed involved with that for years and met a lot of people developing those relationships. So, I think it's important, relationships with your campus, but also looking out, I guess, the one critical point is you have to reach out. No one's going to come to you necessarily and, say, take your hand and introduce you. There might be that, but you have to kind of put yourself out there.

Dr. Leanna Fenneberg: Absolutely. And I'm definitely a victim or have been a victim of imposter syndrome. Right? And so you think about, well who am I to put myself out there? Who am I to volunteer or be named this role within a professional association? And so getting over that hurdle and having some courage to put in an application or volunteer for something. You may feel a little in over your head like I did. But once you're in there and you start to do the work and you start to understand the strengths of all of your colleagues and build those relationships, you never know where it's going to take you.

Stuart Brown: And just because you're getting involved doesn't mean you have all this extra work that you're piling onto yourself. You can decide how far you want to go within a relationship, within a commitment if you just want to be part of. But also there are so many opportunities for people to go further into a program, a knowledge community.

Dr. Leanna Fenneberg: Yes. And I always say while you do spend time and energy investing in the volunteer role, I always get at least as much, if not more, of what I'm giving to the association based on these relationships and connections with people across the world.

Stuart Brown: I like to think when it comes to student affairs, everyone likes to introduce people, I'm going to use the mentor word, mentor people. So it really is taking that step, maybe going out of your comfort zone when you're at regional conferences, national conferences or some aspect of, let's say, the field, people are very inviting and I think that's important and that's the first step to do develop the relationships and like you said for many, many years in the field that you have these people that you can connect with. You can consult with when you're looking for a job. There's so many things as you develop these relationships.

Dr. Leanna Fenneberg: And I also think the principle of investing in relationships and being proactive in that also applies to our work on campuses. I definitely outreach and prioritize relationships even with my colleagues on campus and something I always reference with my staff is the control, influence, and accept model. And so as you think about advancing our work, you think about, okay, what can I control, what can I easily implement on my own because I have the power within my position to do that and what do I need to influence with others. And so, if you're investing in genuine, authentic relationships with shared goals and looking at those with colleagues, you can advance those projects and those priorities for students in our work so much more readily. So, you know, I do that in simple ways like scheduling every other week, I have a meeting with my provost so that we're connecting constantly, personally and aligning our goals and I do that with other colleagues on campus as well. And that continuous communication and reflecting on our shared goals just helps us progress the work that we're doing.

Stuart Brown: I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. I think it's very important. It sounds simple, but it's something that people can look at, work on and it is just going to be bountiful throughout your professional career.

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 want to thank today's guest Dr. Leanna Fenneberg, Vice President for Student Affairs at Rider University. 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'll join us next time for another episode.