



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Hank Parkinson, Dean of Students at Fitchburg 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 one thing you have learned that has shaped 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 on today's episode. I am very pleased to have Dr. Hank Parkinson, Dean of Students at Fitchburg State University. Welcome to the program.

Dr. Hank Parkinson: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you today.

Stuart Brown: So Hank what is your one thing?

Dr. Hank Parkinson: I've learned early on in my career that we must be as educated as lifelong learners, being willing to grow and change with the times and stay current, though professional development education has always been an important part of my career and always will be.

Stuart Brown: Is this something that you also impart upon your staff?

Dr. Hank Parkinson: Absolutely. I fully support professional development, getting involved in conference committees, writing articles, maybe podcasts, wherever they find their niche or the opportunity to grow themselves. I also believe in and I have always believed in professional development within the team, bringing in - maybe we read an article and discuss. There's been times where we brought in outside folks to do some training like strength based training or most recent. Rightfully so, a lot of diversity, equity, inclusion training.

Stuart Brown: Is there a story behind this learner 'One Thing' ?

Dr. Hank Parkinson: As I entered the field back as a grad student when I realized that this is what I wanted to do, the supervisor at a time instilled and supported professional development right off the bat and I got extremely involved with NASPA. And that's where I started as a, in my career within student activities and again, being involved with the conference committee and other things that NASPA did and just fell in love with learning and growing, I was the one that was up front with the notebook, filling it up, you know, listening to almost every word that the presenters had to say in the ed sessions.

And then when I, when it was time and the opportunity, I started submitting proposals to present anything that I felt like that was I could offer or provide. So right from the beginning as a grad student and then that is continue throughout my entire career. Higher education is changing rapidly. If we're not seeing ourselves as educators as learners, we're going to get left behind and we can't be doing the work the way we've been doing it, it has to change and involved. And in order to do that, I think that the folks like us like me that that have the leadership opportunity, this sphere of influence has to be educated has to be a learner to learn about what's new, what are some new theories, new approaches. How can we do this work differently? And the best way I've learned to do that is to read, is to participate in webinars, is to do jump on training opportunities that are offered to me on campus or off-campus.

And then of course continuing my involvement. Now my involvement lies with NASPA these days as a professional, as the Massachusetts State director serving on the New England advisory board.

Stuart Brown: I think it's important what you said about when you started it was your supervisor that really pushed you and it's sounds like you would have been that type of person anyway. But at that level when you

had the person help you introduce you, encourage you that maybe leapfrogged you ahead of other grad students or maybe new professionals because you had that support. So I think for people listening, it is something to maybe think about that. Professional development is important. And as you said, Higher Ed is changing so rapidly and so many new responsibilities fall into our laps and people look at professional development and they just sort of sigh and say, "oh if I had the time." But if the supervisor says "no", we as a unit are going to make time because this is important.

Dr. Hank Parkinson: I think it is the leadership leading by example to support and encourage and provide these opportunities. And I certainly do and have been lucky fortunate that supervisors and other managers in my in my career have also done that my current supervisor is 100% supportive - in fact expects it.

Stuart Brown: other thing, looking at students, grad students, new professionals is to have that push and encouragement to get them started because I think a lot of times it's difficult for people to put themselves out and say I want to get involved, but I'm not good enough. I don't have the support or there's no way I could do what other people do, but it could be an article in in a state newsletter, It could be volunteering on a committee. It doesn't have to be my first professional development involvement is the vice president for NASPA Region One. You can do a lot of things to get that confidence under your belt. And then that's one other aspect of your portfolio as you continue with your learning as you've been saying.

Dr. Hank Parkinson: Where do you start? I think you had said and that is overwhelming. And so when I have an opportunity to mentor new professional and I have, you know, plenty of opportunities. I always talk to them about right away about the support professional development that we need to be lifelong learners and getting involved. And then my next conversation in the very near future is find an organization that speaks to you that you have interest in that you feel like you can learn and grow from. A lot of times the specific to your area. So for instance, I have a newer coordinator of Greek life. So of course, you know, a natural place for that person, that staff member to get involved with is organizations like AFA. And also this advises our programming board. So I'm really having to start to think about getting involved with like NASPA.

You can't take them all on. You have to I think it's you don't want to spread yourself out too thin. So find an organization that supports your values, your profession, your niche and go it.

Stuart Brown: Hank, I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. I think it's very important that we all realize we are lifelong learners that we don't know everything.

Dr. Hank Parkinson: One more thing to wrap up. It starts with you, it starts with us. And you have to be willing to get uncomfortable, challenge yourself that you know what we're not perfect and we can we can do better and we can learn. And that's hard, sometimes it's hard to swallow, but it is an important part of learning and growing constructive feedback is critical in our own development. So be open to that and embrace that.

Stuart Brown: You've been listening to Student Affairs One Thing, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasons 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. Hank Parkinson, Dean of Students at Fitchburg State 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 will join us next time for another episode.

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