



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

Release Date: May 29, 2023

Episode Title: 36. Dr. Jim Hoppe

Summary: Host Stuart Brown chats with Dr. Jim Hoppe, Vice President & Dean for Campus Life at Emerson College.

» studentaffairs.com/podcast/onething

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 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. On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Dr. Jim Hoppe, Vice President and Dean for Campus Life at Emerson College. Welcome to the program.

Dr. Jim Hoppe: Thank you for having me.

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

Dr. Jim Hoppe: I've thought about this a lot, and I think my one thing is to not underestimate the power of the small stuff. By that I mean the things we do every day that sometimes we just take for granted. And it can be easy to fall into this line of thinking that it's only the big grand gestures or the things that come out of a month long committee that are going to have a positive impact. But I learned early on that sometimes the things I do without even thinking about it, I just do as part of my everyday routine, have this lasting impact on a student that I never even really realized.

Stuart Brown: So I can't wait to hear this story behind that one thing.

Dr. Jim Hoppe: I learned this early on in my career and I was an RA as an undergrad at the University of New Mexico back in the 80s. Did a lot of the typical RA things, and our football team resided on one floor of our building. And at that time, we didn't have a very good football team. They were struggling a lot, and it wasn't unusual for the guys on the team to come back tired or have a long practice or after a particularly tough loss and not be in a good mood. So that was an experience I had as an RA was sometimes having to interact and sometimes write up or have interactions with the football team. So fast forward. My first professional job after grad school. I was living in Chicago, and I'm out one night with a couple of friends, a bar someplace in Chicago, and I feel this tap on my shoulder and I turn around, look up and there's this big mountain of a guy and he says, you went to the Univ. of New Mexico, didn't you? And I said, yeah. And he said, You're Jim Hoppe. You were an RA.

In a Kona Hall, weren't you? And I'm thinking, do I answer, yes, because it's hard to come back to me. He goes, do you remember me? And I said no. I'm sorry, I don't. He goes, I was on the football team, and in my head I'm like looking for my friends because I'm thinking I'm about to get pounded because I figured I probably wrote this guy up one time or caused him to have to do extra laps of practice, and he's been waiting all these years to get revenge. And I said, yeah, that's me. And he goes, I just wanted to thank you. And I said, what do you mean? So it turns out one night I was doing rounds and his door was open and I just popped in and said hello or chatted for a minute. And he'd been having a really tough time illness and his family and unsure about his place on the team and some relationship issues. And I guess we chatted for 10/15 minutes or so. And it really had an impact on him. He talked about how it just made him feel seen and that it kind of reminded him they had a place on campus and that there were people that were looking out for him. And I didn't remember this guy from Adam. I didn't remember this interaction. I had no memory of it. It was just something I did as part of my daily routine that has always stuck with me, that things we do make a difference, right? And that the little things can have this positive impact. And so it's this reminder to always try to be present and to just remember that every interaction, try to be respectful, think about what you're doing, understand that the people you're interacting with are going to take something from you, just doing your job and doing things that probably just come natural to you.

Stuart Brown: That's a great story, and it really, I think, demonstrates in our field how you don't always know. And if you didn't have that interaction, you never would have known this. You never would have known the difference. And I think that probably is what happens. Most of the time, we don't bump into people again or even one year, ten years, 20 years later. So I think what you said about being present is so important because we don't know, we rarely will get that type of feedback.

Dr. Jim Hoppe: And I'm sure, like most of us, every so often we get these cards or notes or emails now from students, and they start with, you probably don't remember this, but and so it's just been reinforced time and time again throughout my career, that the little things make a difference. And being there for people counts, even when you don't even realize you're doing.

Stuart Brown: I think it also shows you have to really be confident in yourself because you know you're not going to get that feedback, that it's rare to get that. And we get cards nowadays, it's probably an email. Who knows, maybe even a text, hey, thanks, you made a difference, lol or whatever. But to get that card, and I know people that they save those things. In fact, I retired and I have a folder in a file cabinet with cards and things going back, goodness, 2030 years. And I don't take them out and read them, but they're there. And it's just to remind me that you do make a difference. And for whatever reason, that person wanted to let you know that I have.

Dr. Jim Hoppe: The same kind of file. And it's one of the pieces of advice I give all the new staff that start is save those things, right, take them with you, because you don't get them a lot. And on those particularly bad days, it's a nice visual reminder to open that drawer and see that stack of cards or emails or whatever. It can give you a little push to keep going.

Stuart Brown: I had a guest on season one of the podcast and it was Dr. Nancy Criminan, and she had what was called a memory box. That was her one thing. And when she was in grad school, she said her faculty member told the students to create this and take a shoebox, maybe decorate it, but this is your box and put it on top of a file cabinet. And every time you get something, a card or you get an email printed out and put it there. And if you're having a bad day or you just need to be cheered up, you can take down that box and just read through those to see, yeah, I guess I did make a difference.

Dr. Jim Hoppe: Yeah. And the longer it takes to get those, sometimes, the more powerful they are to realize that somebody's been sitting on that for a couple of years even, and took the time then to thank you.

Stuart Brown: I think when you get it years down the road, that is to me, so powerful that this person, even though you might not have remembered them, they remembered you, they just remembered whatever you did, whatever you said, was so impactful to them. And I think telling your staff, here's something you should do. And I think that goes all the way back to when you're in graduate school because you have internships and you might be affecting students somehow and keep that and make that part of your professional baggage is wherever I go, I'm going to keep that thing so I can refill it when needed. Jim, the last few years has been tough for student affairs professionals. We're being asked to do more with less. Do you think getting these types of notes is even maybe more important today than 1020 years ago?

Dr. Jim Hoppe: Absolutely. All of us are feeling burnout where people are leaving and retiring early and can be difficult, right, to think about. Remind yourself why we do this. And so that recognition of the impact we have means even more today.

Stuart Brown: Jim, I want to thank you for sharing your One Thing. It's a great story and I hope a lot of people listening really take it to heart, because it's something that can really follow you and help you throughout your professional career. You've 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. Jim Hoppe, Vice President and Dean for Campus Life at Emerson College. I am 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.