



**Podcast:** One Thing - New Professional

**Release Date:** November 28, 2022

**Episode Title:** 6. Sam Yang

**Summary:** We chat Sam Yang, a former Area Coordinator at the University of Vermont and currently a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of Southern California.

» [studentaffairs.com/podcast/newprofessional](https://studentaffairs.com/podcast/newprofessional)

**Stuart Brown:** Welcome to the Student Affairs One Thing, New Professional, a podcast that asks a simple question of new professionals in the field - what is one thing you've learned you feel will help you as you move forward in your career. I'm your host Stuart Brown, the developer of StudentAffairs.com. one of the most accessed websites by student affair 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 Sam Yang, a former Area Coordinator at the University of Vermont and currently a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of Southern California.

So Sam, What is your one thing?

**Sam Yang:** Having worked in student affairs for the past four years and started off teaching, I think my one thing is communication and I want to base that communication skills that stem from staff meetings during the time that I worked in residential life. I think the reason why I chose communication is because as student affairs professionals, we communicate on so many levels, not only with students but with students, staff, parents, other staff members, faculty and administrators on a college campus. And often times we find ourselves communicating with student staff because that's what we supervise on the team that we work with on the team in a close quarter for extended periods of time. Staff meetings are something that I pride myself right now, but I did not acquire the skills to successfully facilitate staff meetings at the beginning of my career.

The reason for that is being that student staff, namely residential advisors and graduate students, they are aspiring adults, they're aspiring student affairs professionals, they're aspiring professionals. So they will understand partially the administration and policies of the university, but they will ask challenging questions and sometimes these challenging questions, they don't always make sense. They're not always reasonable. They are still cultivating the skills to be able to communicate effectively and rationally with other adults or student staff on the team. So for me, I had to really hunker down and anchor myself in terms of how we communicate effectively with students, student staff when, for example, there's an unpopular policy on COVID given by the university or when we have to go through and face a challenge and address the problem. We don't have the solutions to it yet. Or there's ambiguity that we have to work with for a short or long period of time. And then this is where I try to really put it in my leadership skills of using active listening and also being able to hold the space and take the space as needed to kind of manage the flow.

**Stuart Brown:** Was there one time where that light bulb went off in your head and said, you know what, staff meetings and the way they're organized and presented etcetera, etcetera, are important.

**Sam Yang:** There is definitely a couple of instances, I wouldn't say maybe one that, that one staff meeting that triggered everything. But let's say the aftermath of, of COVID when we came back in person in 2021. Schools are juggling with, okay, what's the policy for social distancing, masking and interactions on campus. And then we had some policies that were not as popular when you know, announced to the students and then that definitely was not our fault as you know, residential life staff members, we have to discuss those and there were a lot of ambiguity within those policies.

So my R.A.s came into the meeting furious. Right? So it was my job to make sure that I came up with a solution to address how this policy is enforced on our campus and then to minimize the ambiguity as much as possible. Now my supervisor didn't give me that instruction, but I felt like to be able to really effectively lead this team. I needed to be able to utilize that staff meeting time to establish some grounds to be able to have the team work with at least, with some clarity and some transparency, but it turned out to be disastrous. You know, students, they were, they and the staff were furious. They were angry, they were making statements rather

than asking questions, They were suggesting things that are way out of the realm that we're really unrealistic and sometimes just I would call it crazy. I was able to, with the help of my graduate assistant kind of hold down the space and make sure we made some improvements on the set policy and to reach a ground where everybody is kind of satisfied leaving the space. But that's when I realized that you can make so many changes happen in the staff meeting, because this is when student staff, they came in here, they're trying, they're trying to learn from you. But in the meantime I'm also trying to learn from them. It's an exchange of ideas. It's where leadership skills really shine. And then, so yeah, that couple of staff meetings in the beginning of the school year definitely was something that I wish I had gone in more prepared.

**Stuart Brown:** When you talked about staff meetings as your one thing that really resonated with me because I've been in this field for many, many years and I'm going to say, most professionals have no clue how to run a staff meeting. It's on the books, so we have to do it. But like what you would say, well, you prepare for the meeting, you're looking for outcomes and how can there be resolutions? And sometimes you go to these staff meetings and you're just, why are we sitting here? So I think it's so great for that one thing for not only for you to develop, but people listening to this podcast to think, okay, I maybe need to do more when I'm going into a staff meeting, whether I'm the leader or a participant because the participants, that's what the word means, You participate, You can't just sit there and then also at the end when the facilitator says, okay, who wants to take this responsibility to maybe raise your hand because it's kind of silly to have a staff meeting if there's no to do list after and you come back the next week and have the same meeting and you just go over the content again with no resolution.

**Sam Yang:** So for me, what I've learned from staff meetings as one thing is as a leader, I can take the space, but I can also release the space and really see how my student staff can self-facilitate a staff meeting or what they want to take away from it, not what I want them to take away from a set staff meeting.

**Stuart Brown:** Sam, I want to thank you for sharing that one thing. I think it's so important having a staff meeting, chairing a staff meeting sounds so simple, but if you don't put the work in, if you don't practice, it can be, as you said, a disaster. So I think that's a great one thing for people in the field to make sure they work on.

**Sam Yang:** If I can add one thing. You know, we always joke about this whole meeting could have been an email. My goal for my leadership career goal in the future as a student affairs professional is to make sure that nothing like that happens in my team. That people genuinely coming, enjoying the staff meeting and looking forward to it.

**Stuart Brown:** You have been listening to the Student Affairs One Thing New Professional, a podcast that asked a simple question of new professionals in the field. What is one thing you have learned, you feel will help you as you move forward in your career?

My guest today has been Sam Yang, a former Area Coordinator in residence life at the University of Vermont and currently a doctoral student in Education Leadership at the University of Southern California. I'm 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 of Student Affairs One Thing New Professional.

E N D T R A N S C R I P T