



Podcast: One Thing - New Professional

Release Date: January 16, 2023

Episode Title: 8. Howard Thrasher

Summary: We chat with Howard Thrasher, Assistant Director of Career Education for Boston College.

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Stuart Brown: Welcome to Student Affairs One Thing - New Professional, a podcast that asks 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?

I'm your host, Stuart Brown, the developer of studentaffairs.com, one of the most access 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 Howard Thrasher, Assistant Director of Career Education at Boston College. Welcome to the program. Howard!

Howard Thrasher: Hi, how you doing?

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

Howard Thrasher: My one thing is that every experience that you encounter in your career journey is always the lesson to be learned in a story to be told.

Stuart Brown: So that's a perfect opening to what is the story to be told.

Howard Thrasher: Before transitioning to student affairs and services in general. I had no idea what I wanted to do. So the first thing I did out of college was I took a job working at a hotel. I didn't realize it at the moment but realized pretty soon that hotel work was not for me. I couldn't stand it, hated it felt this is not where I wanted to be, but I stayed there for a while because it was good for me financially and I think I learned so much from that experience. I think so much of what I learned in the hotel in terms of how to interact with people, how to make people feel welcomed, how to create relationships and boundaries with colleagues and supervisors.

So much of that helped me when I started my career journey actually in student affairs, where was that which was actually residential life and I think that helped me in residential life in terms of just like yeah, creating a hospitable environment. I just translated that from people to students, but I think I will always say I enjoyed my experience working with students far more than I would with actual, you know, adults, because there's an eagerness to learn among students that I sometimes I did not get at all when I was working in hospitality, but I think when I transitioned from residential life over to career services, I spoke a lot about my experience and my story and how, you know my journey and my struggles to where I am in student affairs, my struggles to figuring out what I wanted to do with my life would really help kind of guide the work that I would do working in career services. I love being able to relate to students and tell them my story and have them, you know, kind of see that themselves and also I want to see that with my colleagues as well.

Stuart Brown: How did you transition from the service industry to student affairs? Did you wake up one day and say I want to be in student affairs or you had a good experience when you were in college?

Howard Thrasher: Actually, it's a weird experience. So I worked in the career center when I was an undergrad, but I never considered that to be a career, a big opportunity for me.

But one time when I was working at the hotel, it was late at night where the hotel was, we had a bunch of like football recruits for a big school and one of the recruits came to me and he was just asking me, he seemed really at all out of sorts late at night, He didn't know where he lost his phone, he couldn't find his friends, he was really confused. I remember stopping him and saying, hey listen, it's a long night. He probably been out all

night doing all kinds of things, you know, how about you just sleep on it and we'll figure out a way if you work it out in the morning. And he stopped, stopped talking, stopped, kind of like responding, and just said, I understand, thank you for that, I think I'll head to bed. Anyone upstairs went to bed and I remember thinking to myself, like that little kind of like word of advice really helped that guy out and I was like, I wanna be able to do this all the time. I wanna be able to offer people like perspective and advice that they could really use for maybe a mentor from someone, you know, who's been there before and so that's what, that was one of the things that said, you know what student affairs might be the thing for me.

Stuart Brown: Taking that episode then, did you look into graduate programs or look for jobs right away? How did you actually become a student affairs person?

Howard Thrasher: I looked into graduate programs immediately, so I actually looked up just higher education careers and the best schools. I reached out to program administrators, I reached out to people who were doing good work, doing good research in areas that I was interested in, so which was working with men of color, working with student athletes, working with L G B T. Q I plus students, just people who were doing that kind of work to kind of figure out the programs that I wanted to pursue.

I ended up at the university of Texas at Austin and this was a wonderful experience. I have so many great mentors there to thank for my experience, particularly Dr. Richard Reddick, who was really kind of a guide for me on this journey to student affairs and actually kind of was one of the reasons I ended up in Boston where I am now, I think like just like really seeking out mentors and people and then going from, you know, finding the schools from there I think was the most helpful for me.

Stuart Brown: Since you went into the grad with a few years of experience under your belt, when you were in the program, did you have these seminars or small group sessions with, let's say, individuals that had come right out of undergraduate and talking through experiences or maybe internships and you're sitting back maybe shaking your head and say, let me tell you about the real world, or let me tell you about some of the things that happened to me?

Howard Thrasher: So I was really fortunate in that, in my program, there were a lot of people who had been out of school for about the same amount of time I had. Now, many of them after they graduated college, they went into a field that specifically aligned with their major, maybe it was like journalism somewhat into business and finance and really didn't find that they wanted to be doing that.

Whereas, like, I went somewhere I never expected to go and did not like immediately. So I think a little bit of difference, there was like, just having this perspective of, like, I know it, it's like to have a job that you absolutely cannot do and like, do not want to go back to where a lot of them kind of felt like, yeah, I'm giving the student affairs thing to try if that doesn't work out. I can always return to this thing I initially done before. So I think the really, I didn't really feel like, hey, you know, let me tell you about how the world really works, but I definitely felt like I've been at my lowest point when it comes to like my career journey. I know that things can really only go up from here and they really have.

Stuart Brown: What I think is so important about your story is instead of looking at, let's say the glass half full, I took a job, I didn't like the job, I didn't like that experience, but you're looking at what you were able to take from that. And as you said, relationships, working with people, solving problems, turning that negative experience into a positive experience. So when you did kind of figure it out, you could take all that with you and I think that's important because sometimes people look at that first job or second job and say, okay, it was horrible the end, there's nothing positive about that, but it's important for people listening to realize anything you do, it could be a job, it could be community experience volunteer work, pull some positive experiences out of that.

Howard Thrasher: And I have so much to think for the mentors and the supervisors that I had when I was working in hospitality, some really just smart, just hard working people who know I wasn't pursuing this career field is them, I still learned so much about them in terms of like, yeah, how to conduct yourself in a professional setting. I learned a lot from other people of color who I saw working in the hotel and kind of like, oh yeah, what does it mean to be a person of color in a leadership position in the hotel and how do you conduct yourself among clients, amongst other employees, amongst your peers? But I learned so much from them and just

valuable information and it's, it's fun too because I feel like every day I'm reminded of something that happened in the hotel or an experience or an interaction or the way in which I saw someone take on interaction.

I'm like, you know what, that was a great thing that they did, I'm gonna imitate that. And so it's, I think I'm really, really fortunate to be able to look back on something that was at this 6 years ago in my past and like I learned a lot from that experience and I was able to take a lot of little nuggets of information and apply them to the work I'm doing today.

Stuart Brown: I keep talking about these experiences outside the field. But one thing I'm forgetting is you can start off in an area of student services and not like it and move within student services. I mean I'll take my own story. One of the areas I started off in was student activities and I love student activities, but I was, I don't want to do this for the rest of my life. So I had to transition. So it wasn't so much a negative experience, but I wanted to move on. But what did I learn as the Director of student activities as I progressed to a more generalist position.

Howard Thrasher: And my situation is different since that I loved working in residential life, I loved just working with arrays. I loved the amount of students I got to see every single day in my hall, the amount of students who I got to basically just whose names I got to remember, I'm a big remembering name person, so I love that. Um, I loved that experience, but I also to felt that part of it, like I didn't want to be doing for the rest of my life, I did not want to be on call forever, I did not want to be responsible for, you know, everything that went on in the building at all times, but I still love the building relationships with students and just other people at the university in general and so prayer services when this opportunity opened up for me, I couldn't wait to jump at it because I knew like I'm gonna continue to be able to build relationships, but I think relationships with students, I look a little bit different, right relationships with peers that look a little bit different. But I think because of my experience already working in career services and undergrad, I was like, this is the perfect opportunity for me.

Stuart Brown: Howard, I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. I think it's an important one thing for people, whether they're starting out in the field or they've been in the field for a long time and especially like like you've done that have really come over from some experiences outside of student services that we all bring in our own backgrounds that can better what we do.

You have been listening to Student Affairs One Thing - New Professional, a podcast that asked 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? My guest today has been Howard Thrasher, Assistant Director of Career Education at Boston College. I'm your host, Stuart Brown, the developer of studentaffairs.com.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.

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