



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

Release Date: April 3, 2023

Episode Title: 35. Dr. Christopher Haug

Summary: Host Stuart Brown chats with Dr. Christopher Haug from the Association of Catholic Colleges & Universities.

» 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 season student affairs professionals. What is one thing you've 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. Christopher Houg from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities.

Welcome to the program, Chris.

Dr. Christopher Houg: Thank you, Stu.

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

Dr. Christopher Houg: That's a great question. Stu I would have to say that my one thing is knowing my, why?

Stuart Brown: That's a very short one thing.

Dr. Christopher Houg: It's a three letter word.

Stuart Brown: So can you explain that? And is there, is there a story behind behind the WHY.

Dr. Christopher Houg: Yeah, absolutely. And it's really not a quick story. It's really an unfolding of experiences for me where I came to that. The language of knowing my why came to me, I don't know, maybe about 10 years ago when Simon Sinek released that famous podcast on *The Golden Circle* and, and knowing your why. And it was, for me, at that point, I thought this is what I've been searching for. This language is what I've been searching for to describe what I feel is really important is that we all know what our mission is. And for Sinek, he describes it as your WHY - your W H Y. So for me, I may start out just sharing that, you know, I was a young professional at the beginning of my career and I had a I had a degree in teaching and marketing. And so I went off and I was going to be a businessman, marketing, education teacher in high schools. And I got there and I thought, oh my gosh, I have to teach people how to sell things that I don't really believe in for the rest of my life. And I had one of those moments where you then go back to some of your mentors and you're like, why did I do this? Why did I study four years for a degree and something that I can't see myself doing for the next 40.

And this faculty member my undergrad said, well, you know, Chris, you could do what I do. And I said, well, what's that? She's like, well, it's called Student Affairs. And I said, well, that's a thing like nobody talks to you at career day in kindergarten about a career in student affairs. And, but of course I was in R A and I was on student government. I should have known what this career was, but she opened my eyes to that and I ended up getting a master's degree in student affairs and went off and worked you know, at a few great public institutions and had a really, I thought what was a really rich kind of experience as a young professional.

But something was missing and I kept searching for that. And I'm a pretty faith-filled person myself. I grew up in the Catholic church, like going to mass, doing service work on the weekends with my family and so forth. But that part of my life always lived separately from my professional life because I worked in state schools. It wasn't always relevant for me to bring up. And there was like this disconnect within me, like my faith life lived

on the weekends, my professional life during the week, maybe it was not that simple, but certainly for purposes of telling the story, it makes sense to kind of delineate it like that.

And then I ended up taking a position at a Catholic institutio. And I took a job in student affairs at the University of Notre Dame. And it was my first time really working for an institution that was highly mission-focused and it cracked me open. Still it was an opportunity for me to really feel that my faith life was intersecting with my professional life in a beautiful way. And I started to understand that the work that I was doing, the work that I was waking up and going to work to do was truly living out my core mission within my own self.

And it was so life-giving. And at that point, I kind of soaked it all up. I drank the kool aid, so to speak. And I just really found it enriching that I could be walking with students in a career in student affairs and doing it in such a way that's lifting up the marginalized and creating a table where all can be seated at and creating spaces for all to belong. And I loved that. It was so enriching. And so it informs the job I took at my next institution, which was another Catholic institution when I became Director of Residences Life and Student Conduct and its residential student leadership. And that informed which institution I decided to be vice president of student Affairs at. And so it became like this domino effect. And then I joined the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities as visiting practitioner. Of course, a highly mission focused organization. And my work with ACCU in DC then informed the work that I'm doing now. I'm still with ACCU, but now I'm back with the Congregation of Holy Cross, which is the religious organization that runs the University of Notre Dame, University of Portland, King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania and Stone Hill College outside of Boston.

I now have an opportunity every day I wake up and I think about the mission of these organizations. And my job is to enliven that mission within all of our campuses. And so for me having that, why, knowing that I am doing what I do because I want to live out and not my words, the gospel. And I don't have to use words to do that. I can do that through actions. It has informed, knowing my why has informed which volunteer organizations I spend my time with on the weekends. I'm blessed to be able to do nonprofit board work now as well. I served on the board of the Philadelphia YMC. And that's a highly mission-based organization. And it provides opportunities for families regardless of faith, tradition or religious tradition to be part of a community and have a sense of belonging. So knowing this, why and being rooted to it for me has just informed so many other opportunities that I've had in my life.

As I look back, I mentioned at the beginning that it wasn't just this immediate aha moment. It was unfolding of experiences for me and an unfolding of influences that have come into my life like Simon Sinek, for instance, he gave me the language to describe what I was feeling. My job at Notre Dame provided me the opportunity to work within a highly mission-focused organization. So all of these things together, got me to where I'm at today. And as I look back to that time when I was an undergrad and then I started teaching business and marketing education, I feel that I'm the same person that I was back then, but I didn't have like a tethering. I wasn't tethered to something.

Stuart Brown: Have you found through your professional career? Maybe the young professionals, even mid-level professionals, maybe they're good at their job, but they're lacking the why and maybe they don't even know they are lacking the why because they want to be good professionals. And that is the main thrust of their focus.

Dr. Christopher Houg: Yeah. And frankly, in our graduate programs, I think we focus a lot on skill development and competency development. Even when I think about how we craft our performance reviews and the processes we put people through. It's about the job, right? It's about making sure that you're meeting your metrics and sometimes the conversation or the space is not there to talk about - why are you doing this? There's a lot of people that I find are in jobs that they're just not happy in. And part of me wonders now, I don't know for a fact, but I always wonder, like, have they sorted out their why? Have they figured out why they're doing this? Are they doing it for a paycheck? And sometimes we've all taken jobs because we need to pay the rent, car payment or we have kids or grandparents that we're taking care of.

But at the end of the day, I, I think pausing and asking some questions. What do I really want to be doing? I think that can actually help a young professional, but I wanted to just be clear, like I don't think anybody should expect that it's just gonna, they're gonna magically wake up one day, pop out of bed and be like, I've got to figured it out. I think maybe sometimes we think that when we're younger professionals that it should be that easy and then we get a little bummed out when life is not so clear.

I think for me, my advice around finding your why or actually exploring your why is making sure that you have thought partners around you that you can bounce these ideas off of. Sometimes people close to us see things within us that we can't see ourselves. And so I think having a identifying good mentors around you, keeping in touch with those people, even when you move on from jobs, this is where LinkedIn can be great even to kind of help us keep connected to people that walk with us in our lives.

Those people can be as sounding boards for us as we um bounce ideas off of them. So for me, like I mentioned it, my finding my, why was an unfolding of experiences, job experiences and my own readings and reflections? I would say the same advice should be true that I would give any younger professional is like, make sure that you're talking, being in community with people and allowing those other people to kind of lift you up along the way?

Stuart Brown: Do you think that sometimes individuals don't want to know their, why they avoid that? They might have friends mentors that are looking out for them or giving them some advice and that person just doesn't want to know the why they are just so focused on the job ahead that they haven't made space in their life to identify the way student?

Dr. Christopher Houg: I think you nailed it. I would also say that we are living in a world that really values skill-based work when you think about how we market even the undergraduate experience. A lot of times families are concerned about sending their student into a career where they're gonna get a job upon graduation.

That's a really important thing, right? You got to pay off the debt, you gotta get your job. Parents don't want you living in the basement. And sometimes maybe we forget that part of that emerging adulthood is exploration of your why or as some might even say, a vocation. And I think about discernment and vocation a lot, particularly in faith-based education. And that discovery of vocation is really understanding what gifts you have, what gifts you've been blessed with. And then thinking about where the world's needs are.

And maybe that is being an accountant and, you know, working for one of the big four. Um or maybe it means going to med school and becoming a great researcher and, and finding the next cure to whatever our world needs. So I want to just be clear that for me, like I'm really, I, I really get nervous when I see parents kind of pushing their students toward a particular job. So when you ask, like, do people not want to find their why? I don't know if parents out there have always had the language to be able to kind of embrace that when they were forming their young person. So sometimes by the time, so it gets to us as a young professional, they've been kind of maybe in an environment in a world that has been so focused on the job that they haven't been focused on discerning the call.

Stuart Brown: Chris. I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. It is something that I think we overlook a lot and especially in today's world where it seems everything is just so job-focused and there are not enough people on campus to do things. So people are working double shifts or just working more time and even the grad students, they don't have time to really do anything between the course work and internships to really step back to look at what is your why.

You have been listening to Student Affairs One Thing, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned student affairs professionals - what is one thing you've learned that has helped shape your profession career? I want to thank today's guest, Dr Christopher Houg from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. 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.

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