NASFAA's "Director Download" – Episode 1 Transcript

Justin Draeger:	Hey everyone this is Justin Draeger, welcome to our first edition of "Director Download."
Allie Bidwell:	I'm Allie Bidwell, one of our Today's News reporters.
Beth Maglione:	Beth Maglione, executive vice president at NASFAA.
Ron Day:	Ron Day, director of financial aid at Kennesaw State University.
Justin Draeger:	Welcome Ron. Ron is also a former national chair. Was the 2013-14 year? Because they all start to bleed together after a while.
Ron Day:	2012-13.
Justin Draeger:	2012-13 year, so that was five years ago.
Ron Day:	It's amazing.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, that went by really fast.
Ron Day:	Yes.
Justin Draeger:	You're also going to be the chair of a new task force for a new track that we're having at our Leadership & Legislative Expo this year, it's advanced topics in leadership.
Ron Day:	Right.
Justin Draeger:	And management. And so you're going to have a group of people, you're developing the curriculum. It's going to be here in Washington, D.C. in February. Brand new track.
Ron Day:	Right.
Justin Draeger:	Super excited about it. And the "Director Download" podcast is sort of teeing up a lot of the topics that you guys will be covering.
Ron Day:	We're very excited about it because it deals with a lot of things like communication initiatives and how do you deal with this, and that and the other. As opposed to what is a Pell Grant, what is a student loan? Really excited about it. I've always, and you know this, you and I have talked about doing

	leadership tracks for quite some time, particularly with a seasoned individuals. So I'm really really excited about this.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, I think the topics we're covering are everything from leadership and management, to tactics, to making sure that you're getting into the executive suite on your campus and getting the attention of your presidents. How to have influence, even if that influence sometimes is an informal, difficult conversations, which you and I were just talking about before we started taping.
Justin Draeger:	I think this is a part of our profession that is unstated, but necessary.
Ron Day:	I agree.
Justin Draeger:	You don't get this usually at a lot of conferences, but it's that piece that allows you to wield really positive change on your campus and hopefully for your students. So let me, today, since Ron you're here for our inaugural episode, we're going to be talking about leadership, what that looks like, what that means, can we describe it and how that might differ from management.
Justin Draeger:	Let me ask you all a question right off the bat. So when you think of like a great leader, whether you've known them personally or read about them, who comes to mind? Do you have somebody like on tap you think of as a great leader?
Ron Day:	Personally, my father, for one. Because he's one of those individuals that was very engaged, but didn't try their best to do something that made life hard. He was a passionate individual, he was an emotional individual. He was not scared to show those. And so I think he led by example and so I tend to go toward my father.
Justin Draeger:	Okay. Good example. Beth?
Beth Maglione:	Yeah, I had a boss. My first excellent boss, I've had others since. Present company included.
Justin Draeger:	If the next words out of your mouth aren't "Justin Draeger," we're moving on.
Beth Maglione:	My first excellent boss, though, before I even knew you at all, one of the great things she did that I hadn't seen modeled before was the victory lap. She really put her staff forward and enabled them to shine and to receive kudos. And it felt so good, she made her staff feel good about their successes that they wanted to be excellent for her.
Justin Draeger:	Great example. Allie?
Allie Bidwell:	Yeah, one person who comes to mind is an editor that I had when I was interning as a college student at the San Francisco Chronicle. And she's now actually the editor in chief of the newspaper, and she's the first female editor in

chief they've ever had. But she was just super confident and a role model that I think any young journalist would look up to.

Justin Draeger: So you all sort of talked about like what I would sort of define as maybe like servant leadership, so putting others forward, being a person. Ron, you talked about your dad who was passionate and had emotion and didn't try to be like a ... He was human.

Ron Day: Yes, right.

Justin Draeger: Allie you talked about an example, a role model. Okay, so let's turn it to the other side, examples of bad ... I'm sure these are like the funner ones to talk about, but okay have you ever worked with or served under somebody who maybe wasn't the best leader? Or maybe needed more development in some areas? What sort of springs to mind there? Do you have anything?

Ron Day: Yes.

Justin Draeger: Everybody's nodding vigorously. Wow, this is such an indictment because it's like there's so many people who need maybe more help than the other way around.

Ron Day: You know, and I go back to that Norman Schwarzkopf quote that we've heard many many years, you know you learn more from the negative approaches than those from the positive.

Justin Draeger: Like I don't wanna do that.

Ron Day: You learn not what to do. And all of us, I think, have superiors that have been, particularly when you're in post-secondary education, the egos are pretty big. And so you have individuals that acquire the positions maybe not at the correct time. And they have visions of management and leadership which probably are not the best. I don't wanna call names.

Justin Draeger: Name names, Ron.

Ron Day: No.

Justin Draeger: Oh okay.

Ron Day: But we've had them, I've had them. And again, I think I learned a lot of things not to do.

Justin Draeger: Beth?

Beth Maglione: Yeah, definitely no names named. And these aren't just people who I work directly for, but I've seen leaders who sort of did the opposite of what I was

explaining earlier. You know, instead of putting staff forward, was more like, I mean honestly I've seen some belittling leaders. I think it was an attempt to bring people maybe down to their place, to not let them fly above their station, to let them know where they belonged in the stratosphere of the office by keeping them down. It's the negative tactic.

Justin Draeger: Or maybe like an old school thought of like if I really belittle someone, or I ream them out in some way, this will in some bizarre way motivate them to do better.

Beth Maglione: Maybe that, yeah. Or just, it's hard for me to understand the motivation behind that kind of management tactic.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, it's sort of fear based.

Beth Maglione: But I've seen it in play and it doesn't endear the staff. I don't think it creates loyalty for obvious reasons.

Justin Draeger: Allie?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, I've had supervisors in the past who, sort of what Beth was saying about the victory lap, it was sort of the opposite, where the only time you hear from them is when something's wrong or when someone's in trouble. And never celebrating individual or team wins, just only hearing from them when it's time to crack the whip I guess.

Justin Draeger: Right and that also doesn't create a lot of motivation then. So I have in my mind, it's the good and the bad is made up of the same sort of the different sides of the same coin. So the good leaders that I've worked with, they were able to articulate a vision and then provide some consistency towards that vision. So these were people that I looked to, and they had an idea of where we, the team or the organization, we were heading. And that didn't mean like we didn't change tactics sometimes or that we weren't agile or we had to like change mid-stream, but they had a vision and then we were working towards that vision.

Justin Draeger: The leaders that I worked with who maybe needed more development, I never felt like there necessarily was a vision and it felt like I was always on quicksand. Like things were changing from day to day. I didn't know where, not only no where I stood, but where the organization stood and where we were headed. Like I can remember in my worst days work with what I would call ineffective leaders, knots, like knots in my stomach about what is happening. I mean there's always going to be some change in an organization, don't get me wrong. And that can create stress, but it's like constant. And that was sort of what I saw as like, that's no good.

Ron Day: Completely agree with that. I think, and Justin I think you're hitting on it. But I'm gonna give you some words that you didn't. I think leaders leave their ego at the door, and they're good listeners. I think the reverse is true of what you're just

talking about. Those people that don't really care to listen and do indeed have those egos that are just monstrous and just try their best to push their agendas forward without any kind of ... I often said leaders are the individuals that allow a lot of wandering, w-a-n-d-e-r. And also allow a lot of ideas.

Ron Day: Now not all ideas are good, and we know that. But I think the good leader's the one that can dissect it and figure out which is the good idea. And still empower individuals and enable them to have that opportunity to lead and provide some kind of the agenda, part of the agenda, themselves. That those individuals that you're talking about, that we've talked about, I think kind of dominate and diminish.

Ron Day: I have a couple things in my office I don't allow. You can't use the word, "yep" or "nope". To me that's dismissive.

Justin Draeger: 'Cause it's too casual?

Ron Day: Not even ... That's not the casualness about it. It's almost, if a person asks a question, it's just yep or nope, that's dismissive in my view. And you should be a person who is willing to answer the question, not with a whole chapter, but a couple of sentences. So it's a way of not being dismissive, like Beth was talking about. I think it's a way of involving, if you will.

Justin Draeger: All right, I'm gonna open the door. Anybody have a concise definition of a great leader they wanna throw out?

Ron Day: I can say these are the quotes I've heard, management is dealing with complexities, leaders are creating simplicities. And I like that because I think we all have to manage, but we also need to lead. And I think sometimes in our profession, financial aid, we tend to be more managers than leaders.

Justin Draeger: All right. I like that. Beth, Allie, anything?

Beth Maglione: Yeah, I think about words like inspirational, motivational, leading change or innovation. Not to say that the lights don't need to stay on. I think there's some elements of what we consider management that a leader still has to make sure those things are getting done. And maybe there are some out there who are visionaries to the detriment of the overall management of their organization. Like I can actually think of examples of friends I know and people who work for organizations where there's very creative leaders who are not great managers in term so like, you know basic HR, good stuff like that.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, that happens particular in D.C on the Hill, this happens a lot. A lot of law makers are like leaders and visionaries and aspirational, and terrible managers. I mean you talk to the staff who work in those offices, their like, no not a good environment.

Allie Bidwell:	But that's why you have a chief of staff, right?
Justin Draeger:	That's right, so you kind of know your strengths and your weaknesses. It's not like leaders are more important than mangers or vice a versa. It's that they don't necessarily have to be synonymous. Is what I'm saying. But they're both important because without management you can't move the work forward.
Justin Draeger:	I think of leaders as their willing to step out in front, which means that sometimes they take the shots that the staff wouldn't take. They take on a disproportionate amount of risk. And good leaders will spread the wealth and the gratitude and the thanks that come in, or the praise, amongst the people who are doing the work. So I think that hits on a lot of things we talked about.
Justin Draeger:	The other thing about leaders is you can't be a leader without followers, which means there has to be people willing to put some trust in you, and that might come from people higher up or a board, but it also means the people that you're attempting to lead. And we talked about a lot of this, and some of the tactics and theories around this with Maura Thomas. Maura in an award-winning international speaker and trainer on individual and corporate productivity and work/life balance. She's a frequent contributor to the Harvard Business Review. She's written works for Forbes and Fast Company and The Huffington Post. She's racked up over a million views in all of her work, author of two books.
Justin Draeger:	We sat down and just chatted a little bit about what is leadership and what is the difference between being a leader and manager? And how do leaders, how should they approach their work?
Maura Thomas:	Good morning this is Maura.
Justin Draeger:	Hi Maura, this is Justin, can you hear me okay?
Maura Thomas:	I can. How are you Justin?
Justin Draeger:	Good, how are you doing?
Maura Thomas:	I'm well, thanks.
Justin Draeger:	We're glad that you could be with us today. We know you do a lot of training on leadership and management and that leads into a lot of the work that you've done that's been highlighted by Harvard Business Review and you've done a TED Talk on some of these things, all of which we'll make available to our audience. But let's start at 30,000 feet, if you were looking at the difference between being a leader and being a manager, and the skills that it takes, how would you approach that? How do you define that?

Maura Thomas:	Yeah, thanks for having me Justin. That's such a great question. So from my perspective I think that all managers are leaders, or can be. But not all leaders are managers.
Justin Draeger:	Okay.
Maura Thomas:	So I believe that in order to successfully lead people, in my experience the most successful leaders are the ones who trust their people and don't micro manage and let them figure out the best way to do things, for the most part. Now mentoring is certainly important, right. When you are a leader, or a manager, it's great if you can offer your team the benefits of your experience and the wisdom that you've gained ostensibly as you have risen to your current position.
Maura Thomas:	But the best way to mentor, in my experience, is to mentor in hindsight. Meaning, when your people come to you, and I teach about attention management and how to get control over distractions. And one of the biggest things that I hear from leaders is, it's really hard for me to get anything done because my team is always coming to me and interrupting me with questions and problems. And so I need to help them with those.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, I imagine a lot of that is coming from a sincere place of like, I don't wanna be the bottleneck. I don't wanna be the place that's holding everything up, and so whenever somebody makes a demand on their time they understandably very much want to meet somebody where they are, or whatever they're needing. But you're coming at this, I think, maybe counterintuitively to a lot of people which is, are you suggesting maybe you're setting your team back by always being there up front to help them make these decisions?
Maura Thomas:	That's exactly what I'm saying. What can happen is that it can inadvertently disempower your team. Because when they come to you with questions and they come to you with problems and you answer the questions and you solve the problems, then the message that you're sending is, well when I have issues like these or problems like these, I guess this is the right course of action is to come to my boss, come to my manager, come to my leader, and let them tell me what to do.
Maura Thomas:	And so what that does is it disempowers them. As opposed to if you said, you know what, I trust your judgment, take a stab at that, let me know how it goes. And then when you meet with them later, then you mentor in hindsight. So how did that issue go? And ideally they didn't even come to you. So ideally the conversation starts, so what kind of challenges and issues did you come up with this week? And what did you do about it? And how did that go?
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, so you're changing the entire, I guess, feedback loop because if they have been trained, maybe by you, if you're the leader, the manager. If they've been trained to always come to you, then you sort of have to do a re-training where you're saying more often, I trust you. Or maybe you're helping them think

through, but you're not giving them the answer that you would say. And then you have to do it on the backend and do a retrospective.

Maura Thomas: Absolutely. Questioning. People like to have meaning at their work, right? They like their work to be meaningful, they like to solve problems, the like to feel like they made progress. And when somebody else solves their problems for them, it takes some of that meaning and that accomplishment away. But the hallmark of a great day at work my clients tell me, is getting stuff done. Is accomplishing a lot. And I that process, perhaps getting into flow, that psychological state where we are fully immersed in the task at hand.

Maura Thomas: And one of the ingredients to flow is the task has to be challenging, but not beyond your skill level. So if it's too easy you get bored. And if it's beyond your skill level then you get frustrated. And so in neither case does flow occur. But if it's challenging, but within your skillset, within your knowledge level, then it becomes very engrossing. And you have the opportunity to get involved in it and then ideally to solve it and come out the other side with this sense of accomplishment. Which also means that you learn and you grow in your position with the organization.

Maura Thomas: And if your team comes to you and you solve those problems, then you rob them of all of that.

Justin Draeger: And ultimately you would think then, down the road as a leader, you would have more time to focus, to perhaps get into flow if you have a team that is then empowered to make decisions on their own and then do retrospectives with you on those decisions that they made. And then you would be spending more time thinking big picture. More strategy. Am I getting that right?

Maura Thomas: Absolutely. It minimizes the distractions on the leader so then also gives them the opportunity to dive into their work in a meaningful way and accomplish things. And leaders often need to spend more of their time perhaps, then some of the other team members, on just thinking. Right? Sort of projecting into the future and anticipating problems and devising strategies. And even just some mind wandering stuff, just thinking time is really important and it's hard to get into that if you're interrupted all the time.

Maura Thomas: And back to your initial question, what's the difference between a leader and a manager? I think that some people when I talk to some of my clients about empower your team, tell them that you trust their judgment. You know the response, and sometimes I just read it on their face, is eww what if I don't trust their judgment? What if I am uncomfortable with the decisions that they will make on their own? And I will say that the person who feels that way, sometimes is more likely to be a manger rather than a leader. Meaning, a little bit more prone to micro managing.

Maura Thomas:	But what I tell people is that if you're feeling that way, you need to look in the mirror because there's two things that might be causing it. One is, you're just a control freak and you're just micro managing and you need to back off of that and let your team do their thing. But if you really are honest with yourself and you still come up with, no no I'm not micro managing. I just am uncomfortable about the decisions this person might make, then you know that's a whole 'nother issue. Maybe you have the wrong person in the wrong position? Maybe that person just has a skills gap that you need to offer them some training on it? Or some of other more drastic situations. But one of those two things is likely at play.
Justin Draeger:	You know I agree with your assessment. And in my position I've found when I have an over tendency to maybe micro manage, it comes down to, maybe they would do it differently than I would do it, but that doesn't necessarily or inherently make it bad or wrong. It's just different. And sometimes the outcome is just as good, if not better. And then the second one is, do you think there has to be some tolerance then that mistakes will be made, but those will be investments in that staff? Like if you've gone down a certain road as a leader and you're seeing someone who might, not make a colossal error, but might make a few errors that cause them or their team additional work. You have to have some tolerance that there will be mistakes, right?
Maura Thomas:	Absolutely, it has to be a safe environment in which to make mistakes, because people don't learn without mistakes. Now there are some ways to mitigate that however, so one way is to give your people some boundaries under which it's okay to make a mistake. So for example, in a customer service situation you might say to your team, look if you can solve the customer's problem and it will cost the company less than X dollars, then you are empowered to make those decisions and you don't have to ask anyone. Or, maybe a sales person who wants to know about discounts or bulk purchases or those kinds of things. Look you are empowered to go as low as 20% on a discount or if you can land a deal with a purchase of over a thousand widgets then you can give them discounts within these parameters, or whatever the situation.
Maura Thomas:	But in order to perhaps minimize the potential for serious, very costly errors, you might give people some parameters under which it's okay for them to make their own decisions and anything out of that, then they come to you. But also then if they do that, if you tell them that and then they do make a mistake and then they get in trouble for it, or even if they're sort of subtly in the doghouse you don't overtly say anything, but they can tell that you're upset with them, then they're not gonna do that anymore. And then you've just shot that whole process in the foot. Right.
Justin Draeger:	All right, let me come at it from the different angle. Let me come at it from the folks that are reporting up to a manager or a vice president or somebody who's a little higher in the hierarchy. At what point do they feel like you as their leader or manger, are unavailable? You know a lot of folks, offices, have like quote/unquote open door policies, or they try to be available and transparent

and they want their staff to feel supported. There must be some line here where in your attempts to free up time for you to be focusing on bigger picture stuff and allowing your managers and folks that you supervise to grow, you might cross a threshold where you are unavailable and that causes frustration for the team.

Justin Draeger: So where is that line and how do you combat it?

Maura Thomas: Yeah absolutely, there's two ways to solve that, well there's probably many, but two come to mind immediately to solve that problem. Number one is to understand that the concept of an open door policy was never intended to mean open all the time anytime, right? An open door policy comes from academia. Right? Office hours from professors. The professor is available for anything you need on these days at these times. And perhaps as a manager or a leader you need to be available a little bit more than twice a week for two hours, maybe like a college professor, but there can be times that you designate, quite literally perhaps with your open door that if the door is open, people are allowed to come in. And if it's not open, then only in cases of emergencies.

Maura Thomas: Now if you leave your door closed all the time, then that's not gonna work. People are gonna knock on it, people are gonna come in. But if you're judicious, saying that there will be times when I need to get work done and during those times my door will be closed. And during those times just do me a favor and wait until it's open again and when it's open I'm available to you. That's one way to do it.

Maura Thomas: Another way to do is, or an additional way to do it, is to make sure that you are meeting regularly with your team, because as a leader your team is always going to want time with you to celebrate wins and to discuss challenges and to get the benefit of your wisdom and to get mentoring from you and to ask you questions and all different kinds of things. And so having standing meetings with your team is another way to minimize those interruptions, and also the drop ins. If people know that they're going to meet with you at least once a week every week, or whatever the frequency is necessary in your position, then they'll hold a lot of their stuff until that time rolls around because it's more efficient for everybody.

Justin Draeger: So one of the things that you say, which I found really intriguing is that the number one successful skill of a leader is their attention management. And I'm gonna try to define this, and then you're gonna correct, or massage this to make it better. But when I hear attention management, what I'm thinking of it, it's basically how a leader uses his or her time. And can they focus their attention on the things that matter most in their role? So do I have that right? And is that what you see as that critical skill that leaders need to have?

Maura Thomas: Almost, it's a little bit less about time and it really is all about attention. Because you could decide that you are going to spend your time on something. But if you

spend that time with your attention split, right, like if you and I went out to lunch to get to know each other, or to talk about some specific issue, but during part of that lunch I also had my phone out and was intermittently taking calls or sending text messages or sending emails or checking emails, then we would have a different experience in that time that we were out to lunch then we intended because my attention was split between our lunch and my device.

Maura Thomas: And so how you dedicate your time is only relevant to the extent that you also devote your attention. So therefore attention management is much more relevant than time management. And I say attention management as a collection of practices. It's about your ability to maintain your focus. It's about your ability to be present in the moment. It's about your ability to engage your flow, to single task, to fully absorb whatever you're reading or the conversation that you're having. It's a practice that represents a collection of behaviors that we can get better at over time, but still some days will be better than others.

Justin Draeger: Maura Thomas, where can people learn more about you and the work that you're doing? Where can they go online?

Maura Thomas: Absolutely, thanks for asking, maurathomas.com.

Justin Draeger: Thank you very much for taking time to join us today. These perspectives are really important, I think they're gonna be really helpful for our listeners.

Maura Thomas: Thanks for having me, Justin. My pleasure.

Justin Draeger: Anytime. Thank you.

Justin Draeger: That actually was a fascinating interview. And I thought Maura brought up a lot of good points, ones that I'm hoping we can get into. And Ron, you guys will probably get into as you develop your track. One of the things that she does hit on is this difference between a leader and a manager. And Ron you mentioned this earlier, but how do you see that in your office? So let's translate this to, first of all for people that don't know, how many students do your guys serve?

Ron Day: 36,000.

Justin Draeger: 36,000. And how big's your office?

Ron Day: 32. Too small.

Justin Draeger: Okay and you are the leader.

Ron Day: Yes.

Justin Draeger: And you have managers that I assume are dividing up the work to make sure that you're getting all these students processed and dispersed. So differentiate

	for us, as you see it in your office, difference between the leader and the manager.
Ron Day:	The manager deals with certain types of things that go in within the office. For example, we have a customer service initiative, or unit. We have a processing unit, we have a technical unit. And they all combine to form the goal of the office. But they all have different functions that don't overlap, but do overlap in some ways. And so it's the fact that they had to manage and lead groups within the office, I lead the whole office and lead the managers. So they deal with all of the complexities within their units. I try to take all of those complexities and look at it from a big picture area to say, how can we then take these processes, which are terribly complex, and make them somewhat easier for the student? And that's my chief role.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, so the managers are getting pulled into the day to day.
Ron Day:	That's exactly right.
Justin Draeger:	They have to clear all the students that are backing up, or the verifications, or the processing errors.
Ron Day:	Yes. And banner.
Justin Draeger:	And banner. What you're saying is, you are looking at the system.
Ron Day:	That's correct.
Justin Draeger:	You're saying, how do we make the system, and you're thinking, I think you said earlier the overall goal or vision of it. So do you guys have like an overall vision or goal for your office? What is it?
Ron Day:	Yes. We try our best to make, again, my chief initiative, my chief goal each year is to say, how can we make it easier and better for the student? I'm just gonna say this very quickly, financial aid I think has a really easy way of making everything managed and not leading it. We have so many rules that are complex and convoluted. If we dealt with just the rules and regulations but didn't seek to make it easier for the student, we could quickly become a very elitist type educational process. The low income kids without the resources, and I think sometimes we're kind of leaning that way.
Ron Day:	So I think the goal of our office is to make it easier, more streamlined, and better.
Justin Draeger:	So let me pause at something here and then you guys disagree or agree as you see fit. So when I think about management I think a lot of ... And I've been a manger and I've tried to aspire to be a leader. Managers I think are doing a lot of reactive work. It's important, it has to get done. But it's a lot of time reactive.

It's, I know this has to get done, or I know this has to be done every day, or this process isn't working right. So they react, they fix, they allocate resources. They might be working towards some proactive stuff, but when I think of leaders I think leaders are the folks that are seeing the big picture, how things integrate, and where they are headed.

Ron Day: That's right.

Justin Draeger: Do you agree or ...?

Ron Day: I completely agree with that.

Justin Draeger: So the problem, let's go really quick your work history. Before you were director, you've been director for how long?

Ron Day: 35 years.

Justin Draeger: And before, okay do you remember back? I can't remember back, that's three decades, 3.5 decades ago what were you before director?

Ron Day: I was not in postsecondary.

Justin Draeger: Okay.

Ron Day: I was a minister. So when you transition from the-

Justin Draeger: Well the minister is like a visionary. Isn't a minster supposed to be like a visionary leader?

Ron Day: Supposedly.

Justin Draeger: All right.

Ron Day: You're herding cats I think more so when you're a minster than you are when you're in a financial aid office. But I went directly from that to being a director, I had no transition. And so that was an eyeopener because here I was accustomed to working with individuals in a different way than I'm working with individuals-

Justin Draeger: And how big was your office when you started?

Ron Day: Three.

Justin Draeger: Three.

Ron Day: Three people.

Justin Draeger:	So everybody was doing everything.
Ron Day:	That's exactly right.
Justin Draeger:	Smaller the office, everybody's doing ... So as leaders come up and they're managers, I feel like there's this tendency, which Maura talked about a little bit, that it's hard to pull yourself out of that role to be the leader.
Ron Day:	It is.
Beth Maglione:	Absolutely. I mean, the work gets done in the middle, the grunt work, the day to day right. So I think if you have been either working for an organization doing the daily work or managing a group of people doing the daily work, that becomes your reality as you move up. And I feel this challenge myself, it's difficult to say, that's not me anymore and maybe I don't need to attend that meeting and maybe I don't need to weigh in on this thing because that stuff feels very personal and you have ownership of it. But making mental space to be visionary, to think about growing instead of controlling the organization, that's really a challenge. Especially if you're new to upper level leadership.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, and I wonder if from an aid office perspective, 'cause I hear this a lot from directors, that sometimes they don't feel that their administration or their president or provost or dean, is necessarily giving them the deference that they absolutely deserve. I mean I'm not quibbling with that point. And I wonder sometimes if the challenges in financial aid you're so busy implementing, dealing with changes that happen from year to year from FSA processing to regulatory changes, that it becomes really hard for a director to carve out time to be visionary and provide leadership and provide initiative to go to your president, dean or provost and say, I've been thinking. I've been thinking about the vision you're putting out there and I'm thinking about new initiatives.
Justin Draeger:	You know that's the sort of stuff that presidents would be looking for, but it's gotta be tough to find time to do that sort of thing.
Ron Day:	It's impossible. You know when I began a long time ago there was ... I'm older than dirt. There were no things as computers, emails and all of those wonderful electronic things that we have nowadays, and it adds all of these different levels. And the rules and regulations were not ... We had validation we didn't have verification, you know and on and on and on. And so they become so complex.
Ron Day:	You don't have the time to practice creativity. And I think sometimes individuals need to understand, if you don't practice creativity you lose the ability to be creative. So therefore-
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, it's like a muscle, right.

Ron Day:	It is.
Justin Draeger:	If you don't flex it, if you don't work it out you lose it.
Ron Day:	It is. And so you get involved in a routine, and the routine becomes comfortable. And then you realize after so many years that, why am I doing it the way I'm doing it? You know, there's got to be better ways but you don't sometimes even have that ability to think outside. And I hate using that word, outside the box. And you really don't have that time.
Justin Draeger:	So the outside the box is used to often it becomes cliché, but I think there's sort of like an emerging word that Maura talked about called, flow. And anybody, this doesn't have to necessarily be a leader, this can be anybody in any position reaching flow. First of all, have you all heard this term before?
Allie Bidwell:	I had not before that, hearing that interview.
Justin Draeger:	So someone, Allie, who has not heard it. What do you understand flow to be? How would you describe it?
Allie Bidwell:	When you have the time to think about the big picture and goals that you or your team are trying to achieve and how you can get there. Like more strategic thinking than day to day tasks.
Justin Draeger:	Yup. I would even say, like flow might be ... I think the origins of flow come from psychology and it's sort of that mindset of like, I'm in the zone. It's a mental state I feel like. And I know I've been in it, but I've been in it when I was in communications where I was writing. Where I would be in this state of mind where I was like unstoppable, making connections that I hadn't necessarily seen before. I've been in it in this position.
Justin Draeger:	It's just this like, essence of like, I am in the zone right now. Have you experienced this before?
Beth Maglione:	I have, it's funny, I had not heard the term either Allie, until I heard this interview. But I recognize the feeling very instantly. The earliest, I told Justin this earlier and it's a silly anecdote, but the earliest I remember ever feeling this and knowing it in my professional life was when I was like 18 or 19 years old and waiting tables. And I remember it would be a busy crazy night at the restaurant but I would have everything going, plates spinning, all my tables were happy. And then later on as a reporter and writer, I remember feeling that same feeling, like you're writing something that's really challenging and interesting, but not beyond your skillset. Like you're not completely out of your depth and you're able to get in there, dig into the research, translate it the way a good reporter does into understandable chunks of information. And at the end you read it and you think, that was awesome.

Beth Maglione:	And time will go by instantly when you're in flow, right.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, so it's like a state of hyper focus, you lose the time and space dimension that you're usually like under the gun to get something done. When you're in flow the idea is like, time's going by very quickly because you're in this creative process, Ron, that you talked about.
Ron Day:	Exactly. That attention factor that she kept bringing up. That management how you do that. And I loved what she kept saying about attention is a resource and to be able to utilize that resource. And what do we really pay attention to? What is the flow of getting to that particular idea is interesting, I loved how she put that.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, so this is the attention management. Maura talks a lot, a writes, about attention management quite a bit. And in her training she delves into this a little bit more. But this idea of attention management because I tried to talk to her, is this time management? And she was very clear that it's not necessarily time management, it's attention management, which means focus.
Justin Draeger:	In the "You're The Director" book I did a chapter where I talk a lot about focus, and this is, like you mentioned Ron, this is sort of like a muscle that has to be flexed. And I'm curious, for those around the room, how you proactively manage focus. And more specifically I wanna ask, Ron and Beth, do you guys have open door policies? Like how often are you interrupted during a day?
Beth Maglione:	So yeah, I do tend to keep my door open. I should also say that our office is a relatively quiet one, we have a fair number of teleworkers, so it's not a rowdy hallway. But yeah, I do tend to keep my door open and I hope my staff know that they can pop in when they need to. Now that said, I have had to be more intentional recently about when I need to really concentrate on something that has strategic implications, I need to write and develop something, then I will close my door. I will sometimes block time on my calendar, turn off Slack, that's our internal email messaging service. And it's so interesting, and every time it dings I wanna look at it. Same with email obviously.
Beth Maglione:	So I've just had to be more intentional. But I'll be honest with you, all these things, these distractions, they do keep me from that sort of experience of flow that Maura described more often that I like to admit probably.
Ron Day:	Open door policy I think is necessary, but there's also, and I hate to use the word danger, in allowing it to be constant. You need to encourage openness, you need to encourage trust. I think the open door policy is vital. I think you need to develop what you call an open door policy within your organization. What does that actually mean? Is it an opportunity just to complain? Because I think sometimes that's what it tends to be. Or is it an opportunity to feel free to offer up ideas and suggestions and feedback and all of these things?

Ron Day:	As a director of a large university, we have an open door policy, my office does, I say that all the time. There are times when I have to close the door and I have to basically say, you guys I am available but I'm not open today. Right? Because there's responsibility I think that we all have where you need to close the door physically but you need to be open otherwise.
Justin Draeger:	So I think this is a really good point because at some point open door policy, I think, got confused with the concept of accessibility.
Beth Maglione:	Yeah, interrupt me anytime.
Justin Draeger:	Right. Like I have an open door policy but that doesn't mean that I'm open whenever it's convenient for you. It has to be a time that works for us. Now short of somebody having like a physical or emotional or a mental emergency, like an open door policy means we'll set up a time and we'll chat in the very near future. And sometimes I actually, like you Beth, I leave my door open a lot and I feel some internal guilt about closing it sometimes. But the fact is, if you want to get into flow besides shutting off all the electronic distractions that you talked about, there's sometimes like I need to shut the door because I actually need to be able to concentrate.
Justin Draeger:	And you know, I come from Toledo, Ohio. I come from a family of people that have worked in manufacturing, so the concept of me in a white collar job, sitting behind a desk with my feet up conceptualizing something is laughable to a lot of my family. It's like, yeah we know you're working hard. But you know, sort of sarcastically, but the truth is, in my mind leaders whether they be in an office or a campus or an organization, they are making connections between what appear to be disparate or unrelated concepts. And then they connect those things in a way that provide a pathway forward. And you can't do that without the time to creatively think and notice patterns that otherwise go unnoticed.
Justin Draeger:	And I don't know how you do that unless you close out the world and just think.
Ron Day:	You have to. It has to be purposeful. You have to basically, you're open door policy has to be a purposeful policy, program, or whatever you wanna call it. I think you need to instill in everyone to basically say, I am approachable. You can trust me. You can come in and talk to me. You can offer suggestions and advice. But you also need to make sure everyone understands, yes there are responsibilities that I have that maybe you don't have, and therefore I have to carve out my time to approach those things that need to be approached.
Beth Maglione:	There's another piece here too that I think is really important as we're talking about staff coming to talk to you. You sort of always want that to happen, but then again, you want to empower your staff not to have to come to talk to you about every single thing, right. So that can be as somebody who came up through the ranks challenging because you wanna have your fingers in it all. And you do naturally have opinions about the quote "best way" to accomplish a

certain task or do things. But you know giving, and Maura I think talked about this, like making space for mistakes and creating a trusting environment where like, okay and maybe it's not a mistake, maybe they just did it differently than you would have. Or maybe they did make an error but it's not insurmountable. But just allowing that to happen and saying like, I'm empowering you to not come to me. Go do it.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, there's another psychological aspect here of besides I also came up to the ranks and so there are things that I have definite opinions on. But one, they might be dated. They might not fit in today's environment. And so I try to recognize that. Two, people need space to find ways to do things better. And then the final one is, sometimes I can see mistakes on the horizon, or I see risks on the horizons. But when I think of great leaders one of the greatest leaders I had when I was very early in my career working in an aid office, was the president. And I can remember in the organization there was a time somebody made a colossal screw up, it was pretty big. And costly. And that person did not get fired.

Justin Draeger: And I know when there are like disciplinary issues that don't get handled that can also decrease morale, but in this instance it was a person that had been with the school for a long time. And I remember him saying at an all staff meeting, like we had a mistake, he wasn't like pulling the person out or pointing them out. We had a mistake. But everybody knew about it, he was addressing an elephant in the room. And he said, I look at this as an investment. It was a mistake, it was painful, we won't make it again. And it was absolutely right. Like he saw those mistakes as investments.

Justin Draeger: Now I don't know whether he saw it coming or not, but my point is it's okay to allow room for mistakes because people learn from them. I don't know, that's a hard thing for me to keep my hands out of. If I see something on the horizon, but I'm sort of like, you shouldn't get involved in everything. You can't be.

Ron Day: No, but I think you're hitting on some things. I think financial aid officers, administrators particularly, go home at night and wake up in the middle of the night and just with the cold sweats when people make mistakes. Our mistakes are money. Our mistakes are compliance. Our mistakes make it the front page of the papers, and on and on and on. And so you have to be very cognizant of training. And I think sometimes we don't train effectively for these individuals. It's very band-aid-ish. You know, I'll band-aid this right now and deal with it later. So those are the things that keep us up at night.

Ron Day: But I always like this quote that I think was done for geriatrics years and years ago basically said, what is the thing that you would like to redo in your life? And they all said, I would take more risks. And I think it carries over into our profession. It's allowing these risks, but you have to really take care of the risk in a different way because our risk are very dangerous.

Justin Draeger:	Yeah, and maybe it's not even a compliance risk. What if you're going to set up a new customer service process, or you're going to move to a one stop shop and you say, we're gonna try it. The experiment's gonna be however long, and if it doesn't work we'll admit that it didn't work. But it's a risk, you're trying something different because you're trying to move the work forward for your students.
Ron Day:	And those, I think, are the hardest ones to deal with because we're so accustomed to dealing with the risk associated with compliance. That goes back to what I said earlier. We don't have the time to set aside to handle, to approach, those risks.
Justin Draeger:	Right. And part of that is working in a safe environment where you are in a place where you are supported by your administration or higher ups or your board of trustees to say, you took a calculated risk and if it didn't turn out well for them to say, we learned from it and-
Ron Day:	And that's a challenge.
Justin Draeger:	Let's move on.
Ron Day:	A huge challenge in aid offices.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah. Well, these are some of the topics we'll be getting into at the leadership conference in terms of, how do you foster relationships with trust with your higher ups so that perhaps their risk tolerance is a little bit more? Also, trying to read the signs from your board and your president about what the risk tolerance of the university is. You have to know the history. There's a lot embedded in there.
Ron Day:	Oh yes.
Justin Draeger:	So Ron, if we were to ask your staff if they felt empowered to make decisions, what do you think they'd say?
Ron Day:	I think they would, I hope they would say that, yes I do allow that. Because I am not a micro manager, I've never done that. I allow my people to, again I'm gonna use the word wander, give me your ideas, tell me what you're going to do, don't ever let me be caught off guard.
Justin Draeger:	Right.
Ron Day:	But in the same light, you have the ability to come up with your goals for the year of your unit, or your division. Tell me what's going on, but just make sure, I don't like dressing in orange jumpsuits. So do whatever you do to keep me out of an orange jumpsuit.

Beth Maglione:	That's a good parameter.
Justin Draeger:	Although sometimes I think prison life would be simpler than the complexities.
Beth Maglione:	You can read all day long. Pretty sure they have-
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, I don't know what their access to library content is, but okay.
Beth Maglione:	Yeah, so I was reading a little bit in preparation for this. And you know there does seem to be a debate out there about what's better a manger or a leader? The leader obviously has some cache, the manager is sort of perceived as like getting your hands dirty. There's a certain grubbiness to management. But I think, you know, that struck me wrong in a lot of ways because I think that there has to be a balance there between this person who is getting it done, making sure that targets are reached and reporting back on those - AKA a manager. And then the person who's also making room for a visionary. And strategic planning and things like that.
Beth Maglione:	So what do you think? Like as we all aspire to lead, how can you also keep the lights on and make sure that folks are gettin' it done?
Allie Bidwell:	One thing that came to mind for me, and just that I've seen as I've been at NASFAA compared to other places I've worked, is that I think a lot of it probably has to do with turnover. Because if you're constantly re-training new staff then the manger is never gonna get the opportunity to become a leader. But like here, we have people who generally stick around for a long time and you can slowly transition into different roles and handoff certain responsibilities to other people and move forward that way. So if you can find a way to address turnover, then that might help on the leadership side as well.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, I think the environment in which people are growing is definitely, that ecosystem is pretty vital. I also think that going back to the arrangement, or maybe the debate, about manager versus leadership. I think there's some self-reflection that's helpful there because you might be like a hell of a manger and maybe the pressures of leadership or being the number one, that might just not be for you or it might not be for you at that time in your life. There are times and seasons, right. So I sort of feel like both are necessary. It's like trying to choose between my hands and my feet, like I need both. I don't know which is the leader and which is the manger in that scenario.
Justin Draeger:	But I want both of them, you have to have both of them to move the work forward. But I joke a lot like, my next job would be, like my next perfect job would be like UPS driver. Like I do the job, I'm active, I meet lots of people and I leave my job at my job. And the point being is like times and seasons. There's times when you wanna grow and be a leader, and I think there are times when you wanna be a manger. And sometimes you don't wanna manage anything or anybody. You want to just keep your nose down and do the work.

Ron Day:	That's exactly right.
Justin Draeger:	And so there's the self-reflection aspect of it.
Ron Day:	You know I oft times keep thinking about this particular item that I think sometimes people forget in leadership. There's a sense of confidence in leadership, but there's also a sense of doubt. And I think it's the ability to live in both of those worlds at the same time. It's how you navigate and deal with the pressures of doubt, I think that's where the leadership aspiration goes. Managers, you have to be both. If you're in financial aid, particularly in the role of director, if you're not a manger and a leader, I think you're probably not successful.
Ron Day:	But I think it's the key thing with leadership is the ability to understand there are pressures and they are going to be there and you have to lead effectively and appropriately. But there's always going to be this doubt in the back of your mind, but how do you navigate that? And I think that's the challenge.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, I think that's a really good point.
Beth Maglione:	I do too.
Justin Draeger:	This idea of the folks where you don't connect with them on a human level because they don't express any doubt or they don't ever question, that always leaves me unsettled. Because there's always this doubt that these are calculated risks.
Beth Maglione:	Right.
Ron Day:	Right.
Beth Maglione:	Even as a leader we don't need to give the ... I don't think we need to give the impression that we have all the answers, right. I mean, that's why you go to your staff. And then there's this other idea too, and I feel like I touched on this when I talked about the bad managers I've had in the past. Yeah. Of like emotional fitness, being able to manage the ups and downs. I mean, who hasn't had that boss that was a yeller and it's just so demoralizing. I mean that person might be the most visionary strategic thinker, but if they aren't able to sort of maintain a balance in their emotional life and reflect that to their staff, then the staff aren't feeling like they're gonna catch hell every time some little thing happens. Then oh man. I mean, that's a tough thing but it's gotta happen.
Beth Maglione:	The best leaders are those, in my opinion, who really have like a broad picture, a calmness, a zen, and don't reflect all of their anxiety onto you.
Justin Draeger:	Yeah, I think folks know, most people, our members know people here that work on the NASFAA staff. One of the people who I think is very zen-like is

Megan. I think she's very collected and calm. My favorite is like a couple months ago we were having a very big convening here in the NASFAA office, we were making a case to some law makers and some of the higher aid community people. And it was on the heels of an all staff meeting and she couldn't get the technology to work in this conference room where we were having the meeting. And she sent me a text where she wasn't her normal zen-like state. And I of course took a screenshot of it because it's so un-Megan-like that I love it.

Justin Draeger: And the thing I love about it is that going back to something that you said at the very beginning Ron, about your dad and leadership. Like leaders aren't robot, they're not emotionless, but they're mostly reflecting back confidence in their teams. And as Maura said, if you don't have confidence in your teams, that's like a whole 'nother problem. But the reflecting back confidence, but it doesn't mean that from time to time they don't have emotions, or they don't feel passion, or they don't feel panic. That's the human nature of it, it just can't be your predominate leadership state.

Ron Day: And again, I keep going back to the profession. And this is the thing I hope this track can help benefit individuals understanding of is that to manage what we do is so complex and so convoluted and so regulated. Overly regulated in my view. If we don't lead effectively to enable our students to gain access and success, I think we have failed. And I really believe that our profession has really trained mangers, but hasn't done a very good job of training leaders. And that's, I hope we can indeed add something that can benefit individuals with that.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, and you're gonna solve that problem for us.

Ron Day: Oh yes.

Justin Draeger: This February.

Ron Day: In two or three days we'll solve the whole world's problem.

Justin Draeger: I am confident that you know and I know Ron, that there are some amazing leaders in our profession. And they're gonna have a lot to share with folks as they transition from that management role into a leader, a campus leader hopefully. And maybe even a regional and national leader on student aid access and success.

Justin Draeger: So thank everybody for joining us. We will have another edition in two weeks. And we'll keep running this limited podcast all the way up until the leadership conference in February. So send us your comments, remember to subscribe, tell your friends. Thanks.