

NASFAA's "Off the Cuff" Podcast - Episode 168 Transcript

Justin Draeger:

Hey everyone, welcome to another edition of Off The Cuff, I'm Justin Draeger.

Allie Arcese:

I'm Allie Arcese with our communications team.

Megan Coval:

And Megan Coval with our policy team.

Karen McCarthy:

And I'm Karen McCarthy also with our policy team.

Justin Draeger:

Welcome back everybody. I wanted to kick off before we got into the agenda today, we do have a lot of things to talk about, but big, big controversy in every neighborhood across the country, with an important date coming up here, Halloween. And I'm curious what you all are doing about passing out candy or not. And Megan, for you, with young children. In our neighborhood, this is like five star alarm fire in our neighborhood. The chats on Facebook will not stop about Halloween. So what are you doing?

Megan Coval:

Yeah. So I think we're just going to leave a bowl at the end of the driveway, which I feel like is going to be frowned upon but...

Justin Draeger:

Well, is that the agreed upon neighborhood thing? You guys just all are going to leave candy at the end of the driveway?

Megan Coval:

Well, so this is the thing. So we have a neighborhood Listserv and also a separate mom's Listserv for the neighborhood. And the mom's Listserv is going wild about this, and they started like September 10-ish, I think, on this topic.

Karen McCarthy:

Oh my gosh.

Justin Draeger:

Really thinking this through.

Megan Coval:

Which felt a little early. And they basically just wanted everyone to agree on one thing. And there were all these ideas thrown around and then finally somebody was like, "Can we all just do our own thing and what we feel comfortable with?" But there were lots of different creative ideas but...

Justin Draeger:

Somebody posted in our... We have a lot of different Listservs too but mostly people use Facebook, which is the only reason I can use Facebook anymore. But Facebook, and they posted it. Somebody was like, "I want to adhere to what Fairfax County is advising. So what do you guys think? What should we do?" And I went out and looked to see what Fairfax County is advising and they're advising not to do Halloween. So I'm like, "What are we doing? It says not to do it. Why are we doing it at all?" So this is what we came up with. People are going to cut out paper cutouts of pumpkins and then hang them on their door. And that's a signal that you are participating.

Megan Coval:

Okay, but do you have to do...?

Justin Draeger:

Wasn't the rule just if you had your porch lights on and why can't that rule just continue.

Karen McCarthy:

I was wondering that.

Justin Draeger:

I don't know why we need a completely separate process for this.

Megan Coval:

So why is our neighborhood...?

Allie Arcese:

I was just going to ask Megan, why is it frowned upon to leave a bowl at the end of the...

Megan Coval:

Well, because everyone is putting their hands in.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, but candy is wrapped.

Megan Coval:

Well, that's what I think, and then..

Justin Draeger:

No, in my neighborhood we're wrapping the wrapped candy. Like people

Megan Coval:

Well, what's the different then? [crosstalk 00:02:45]

Justin Draeger:

And they only want to wrap it in tissue paper because that is recyclable. I pray to God, nobody from my neighborhood's listening, but it's crazy.

Megan Coval:

And then they talked about shooting, like having somebody at the door with a tube of wrapping paper and you shoot the candy down.

Karen McCarthy:

Mega, I saw people with PVC pipes. You can get a PVC and like set it up so it goes down your step railing and then just out to the kids.

Allie Arcese:

But what if you don't have steps?

Justin Draeger:

What are you going to do, Allie? How are you guys going to handle this Halloween situation?

Allie Arcese:

I don't know what the trick or treating situation is in our new neighborhood. And we don't have a Listserv that I know of. And it seems like most of the kids I've seen are older, like high school. So I guess we'll put a bowl out. I don't know. Or I'll just eat it myself.

Megan Coval:

I think Allie, that's the winning solution.

Allie Arcese:

I was just going to say, I know we're in the middle of a pandemic and everything, but candy is wrapped. You can spray it with some Lysol and stuff and wash your hands and whatever, but it's just excessive to wrap wrapped candy.

Megan Coval:

That's what I thought.

Justin Draeger:

Call me a curmudgeon, but can we just skip a year? What's the importance? This isn't Christmas. This is Halloween, right? Every year I was the same thing. It was a clown or a hobo. It was the easiest thing I could do.

Allie Arcese:

I was a hobo once too.

Justin Draeger:

I know that's not acceptable, but as a kid, you grab an oversized shirt from your parent. Then you take some filth or grime and grease and you just rub it on your face. And again, I'm not saying it was PC. I'm just saying it was the easiest thing, because it was about the candy.

Allie Arcese:

You want to know what the dumbest costume I ever had was? One year...

Justin Draeger:

Yes?

Allie Arcese:

Well, this was when we were living in Missouri. And I don't know why my mom let me do this. Probably because it was just like so easy. She had to do nothing, but I went as a bag of leaves.

Justin Draeger:

So like a garbage bag and stuffed it with leaves?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, I taped a couple of leaves on the front.

Megan Coval:

Love that.

Karen McCarthy:

That's good.

Justin Draeger:

That's what Halloween was to me. Now it's elaborate. My kids enjoy the dressing up. I've never understood that. I'm like, "This is about the candy, right?"

Megan Coval:

Yeah, it's about the candy.

Karen McCarthy:

Have you seen some of the photos the staff has been sharing today?

Justin Draeger:

Uh oh, no.

Karen McCarthy:

People go all out. There are some really... Like with the whole family, like the theme costumes and mom and dad dress up with the kids in there.

Justin Draeger:

I fully support it. Go for it. I don't have the energy or the creativity. In fact, most of the times I'm like, "Today's Halloween? Uh oh, I hope we have candy around."

Megan Coval:

We'll see. We'll see how it all shakes out.

Justin Draeger:

All right, well, hang in there. People can let us know what they're planning on doing for Halloween.

Megan Coval:

Maybe we'll get some ideas.

Justin Draeger:

I've never seen so much conversation generated on our neighborhood Facebook page then on the Halloween [inaudible 00:05:40]. But we have lots of things to talk about today. Like I said, we were going to talk a little bit about some more COVID reporting. We have some things going on with student loan debt, and we want to talk about what has become our evergreen topic, Megan, whether we're going to have a deal on another COVID relief bill. But first, let's start with member comments. Allie?

Allie Arcese:

So last week, if you guys remember, we had a special guest, Senator Lamar Alexander, on the podcast. If you didn't catch last week's episode, definitely go back and give it a listen. Heather Butell from Vanderbilt wrote in and said it was great hearing from Senator Alexander. She's met with his staff several times and it's so refreshing to have a member of Congress really understand the financial aid process. Also really respect that he is retiring and allowing new people to step up. He will be missed though. Unfolding my paper FAFSA right now as a tribute.

Justin Draeger:

I feel like a lot of people reached for their paper FAFSA in that episode.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, I was a little disappointed. He didn't have it on our Zoom call. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. I think he might've been at his cabin or something. We can excuse him, not having FAFSAs there.

Allie Arcese:

He didn't travel with it, I guess.

Allie Arcese:

Also Kathleen Wright wrote in and she said, "Discussions are starting to take place on campus about how the spring semester should look, such as should we have spring break or just have classes for straight 15 weeks with no breaks. The current pandemic rules have been extended to December 31st,

2020. Any idea of the likelihood of them being extended through the end of the 2020-21 academic year? If they are not, what are the consequences of continuing to operate as we currently are with so many classes online?" I'm going to pause there. There's a little bit more after, but...

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. Let me focus on the question, which was what is the likelihood, and then I'll see if you all agree. I think the likelihood is pretty great that we'll see extensions of a lot of the flexibilities that have been offered to schools. The answer that I don't know was asked, which is probably just as important as when will those flexibilities be granted, and that I have no idea on. Because that's wrapped up in, do we still have a pandemic? What's the politics around the pandemic? Is this administration acknowledging that this is still being disruptive because they've had an agenda to try to get people to come back in person. So all of this has to be messaged and it's not all sitting with the department of education. This is sometimes between different agencies and with the White House. Karen, Megan, you guys agree or disagree there?

Megan Coval:

I agree.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. I do agree. I have one point of clarification. I feel like that this is my role at NASFAA to clarify is that the flexibility's right now or in place through December 31st or the payment period when the pandemic ends, whichever is later. So if the pandemic continues, technically the wording is the national emergency state that we're in right now, into the next semester then the flexibilities will automatically be extended through there. So we are not kind of on pins and needles, waiting for ED to extend, exactly like they have been doing all along. They have seemed to recognize that this isn't ending anytime soon. So with this extension, they did put that wording in there. It's December 31st or when the national emergency ends, whichever is later.

Justin Draeger:

So Karen does that mean you don't expect to actually see them extend this into the new year?

Karen McCarthy:

I think that they will feel that if we're still in a national emergency, they don't have to put out any guidance because they've already done that in the guidance that's out there right now. As long as the national emergency is still in place, the flexibilities are extended.

Justin Draeger:

So why put a date in at all then? Why put in a December date?

Karen McCarthy:

I don't know, in case... I don't know if that was like some kind of hopeful wording that by December 1st we would not be in the national emergency. And so when do they end? When did the flexibilities end? Well, it's December 31st then. I don't know. I think that might've just been overly optimistic wording.

Justin Draeger:

So you're looking at the other side of the equation, which is, well what if the pandemic was over in October?

Karen McCarthy:
Right.

Justin Draeger:
Well, these still go to the end of December. That is cute. Alright.

Megan Coval:
Bless your heart.

Justin Draeger:
Anything else Allie?

Allie Arcese:
No, that was it.

Justin Draeger:
Okay. Alright. Let's jump right into our agenda. Megan. I feel like we have to do this every week until we actually see this done. Do we have another COVID relief bill?

Megan Coval:
No, we don't.

Justin Draeger:
Alright.

Megan Coval:
But they're starting to talk again today, apparently, according to what I read this morning, so good news, I guess.

Justin Draeger:
I feel like it's worth, just so everybody remembers, just a quick primer, like history. The house passed their next COVID relief bill. Like when, beginning of summer, right? Was that in May or June?

Megan Coval:
May.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. Back in May, the Republicans had a counter offer. And when I look at the two bills, I was just doing a federal update this last week. So when it comes to higher ed funding, they were both in the neighborhood of around \$30 billion, which is still double than what we received in the CARES Act back in, was that March?

Megan Coval:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. So they're really not that far apart. I think they're like seven or \$8 billion apart on higher education funding. So we're really caught up in a much larger issue here. And I remember the biggest sticking points in all of this were one, the \$600, extra unemployment benefits.

Justin Draeger:

There was a lot of discussion between Republicans and Democrats on that. And then the second big piece that I remember being controversial is just the politics around this. And I hate when politics trumps policy. And I don't mean that in president Trump parlance here. I just mean when politics, overrules. Democrats, I think are wary of one giving a victory to the president this close to the election when Democrats are polling pretty well. But even more than that, they might get a better deal if there's a Biden administration. So I think there's some hesitancy on the Democrats part to give, and then on the Republican side, they still have to answer for fiscal conservative zealots. They have to go back to their districts and they say, "We cut another bill that spent a lot of money that we're not sure is actually going to be the long-term solution." So politics on both sides of the aisle. You want to call it for us, Megan? Are we going to have one before the election? After the election?

Megan Coval:

I feel like we won't see something until the new Congress comes in. That's kind of where... I feel like the talks at this point are, this is sort of cynical, but just lip service.

Allie Arcese:

It feels like Groundhog day, like you get up and they're like, "Oh, we're talking again." By the end of the day, they're not talking. And then the next day it's just like, repeat, repeat.

Karen McCarthy:

You're right, Allie. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

I agree. A hundred percent. It's unfortunate because when you have a higher ed, both on Republicans and on the Democratic side that are \$30 billion, which is double the amount we had in the spring. And both seem to be pretty close. I know seven, \$8 billion ain't nothing, but overall there was widespread agreement on this big number, but it's just caught up in these much larger conversations that unfortunately don't make it feasible before the election. Who can predict what a lame duck looks like? I don't know. There's so many different scenarios based on how the election turns out.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. I've thought about that too. And I think there are literally a dozen different scenarios that could happen, but I do think we will get some additional funding through COVID relief.

Justin Draeger:

This is not... This is bi-partisan. Both parties recognize higher eds in dire straits, K-12 too for that matter [crosstalk 00:13:32] budgets. But for other reasons, they just can't come together on a larger bill. We will stay tuned. Yes. Forever hopeful.

Megan Coval:

Forever hopeful.

Justin Draeger:

Let's move on to some student loan information. Some new reports came out this week. Allie, you want to catch us up?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. As, as things on Capitol Hill are stalled with COVID negotiations and Supreme court nomination process, it's been a little bit slower on the higher ed news cycle, but we did have a couple of reports come out. One was from JP Morgan that was looking into racial disparities and student loan repayment. And it found specifically that black borrowers were almost twice as likely as some of their other peers to likely never be able to repay their student loan debt. That was 13% of black borrowers compared to 7% of white borrowers and 8% of Hispanic borrowers. Some of that comes down to just systemic inequities, various other things. It's hard to nail these things down specifically, but median income is lower among the black borrowers who were studied when compared to some of the other borrowers.

Justin Draeger:

Right. And given all the conversation that we've had in this country over the several months in particular, more acutely about systemic racism, not that any individual necessarily is racist. It's about there are inequities built into the system, as you just talked about, Allie. So this sort of data is not something we should hide from. Sometimes it's difficult to disentangle this from socioeconomic status, but sort of dis-aggregating data so that we can understand what's going on to different populations is an important part of the access and equity equation.

Allie Arcese:

I was going to say this kind of adds to a somewhat growing body of research. We've seen different studies in the last couple of years, looking into black students are more likely to take on debt in the first place, to have to take on debt in the first place. Like there have been other studies demonstrating how they're more likely to default on their loans, to struggle repaying their loans with all else being equal to their peers.

Justin Draeger:

Right. And, and Megan, this is something that we've focused on with Congress as well. Like, remember Senator Warren in particular, with some other senators, solicited feedback and comments about racial disparities in student loan debt.

Megan Coval:

Yeah. This was, I think, early last year in 2019. Yeah. But we did a whole kind of brief on this and submitted it to them officially for them to kind of take into account as they think about how Congress may tackle this issue. So we should definitely link back to that.

Justin Draeger:

On top of all of this, we had some news, I think, an issue brief that came out of the Institute for College Access and Success, maybe that talked about school's responsibility to help students successfully repay and what some schools are doing to help successfully repay. Megan, you want to catch us up?

Megan Coval:

Yeah. So this was a brief that highlighted findings from a kind of a longitudinal study I would call it from the Institute for College Access and Success, as you said, Justin, but also the Association of Community College Trustees. So as a partnership and what they did was look at strategies that several different institutions, all of them community colleges, have been employing and implementing to help reduce default rates. And all of these schools notably that they've been following were at a point around their fiscal year 11 CDRs, where they were hovering around that 30% threshold. So they started with these schools who really did have a problem

Justin Draeger:

And so the schools that found success, what were they doing differently from other schools?

Megan Coval:

I mean, they highlighted a couple of schools in this report, but it seems to me that kind of the major trends of successful strategies these schools were employing were number one, really relying heavily on data in a way that they hadn't before. So really drilling down on who their defaulters were at a pretty granular level. So one of the schools found that it was those who midterm, those who were in remedial courses, those who were taking fewer than 15 credits, those who were Pell recipients. So really focusing on that piece and paying attention to it with great frequency. So some of these schools said, "We look at it every single month to try to identify who these students are and if there's new students in those buckets every single month." And the second big thing is they really focused on making default prevention a campus wide issue.

Megan Coval:

So having, or establishing committees or communities across campus, faculty, financial aid staff, staff from student services and disability services who were all focused and committed to this issue and then kind of integrating it in their respective work. And it seems like that combined with the data has been really successful for them. I would just say it's nice to see this work because I think when we talk about CDR and we think about it always has kind of this negative connotation, and we're talking about sanctions and schools getting in trouble. And I think the work of TICAS and ACCT here is really important to highlight good practices and strong practices and effective practices and show that there are ways to make a difference and move the needle on this.

Karen McCarthy:

One of the things that jumped out at me at this, Megan, and I don't follow research super closely, but I thought it was really cool that the longitudinal aspect of it cause I think they started it back in 2014 and I haven't seen much default student behavior, campus intervention research that really stretches out over that period of time. So I think you can really... It makes it a little bit easier to see what might be an actual impact instead of just a correlation like a one-year fluke or something like that.

Megan Coval:

Yeah. I should've mentioned that in the beginning. Thanks Karen. The first time they reported on these schools was in 2014, and I think it also just underscores that this is not... This type of change won't happen after you implement a program just in one year. You really need to integrate it into the way your campus is working and thinking about things. And I think setting it up in this way does that. So hopefully they continue.

Justin Draeger:

Very helpful. And for a lot of schools who we're heading into a recession, have been for several months now, defaulting is a lagging indicator. And so a lot of schools who are concerned about their core default rates and their borrowers being successful in repayment would want to start taking action now before it becomes an acute issue. Yeah. Alright. Thanks very much. Alright, Karen, we have some new information out of the Department of Education this last week on HERF reporting.

Karen McCarthy:

Yes, we do have some new information regarding HERF reporting, which is kind of this confusing moving target, I would say. So very briefly right now, schools are posting their public reports to their websites regarding the student portion of the CARES funding and how they awarded the emergency grants and what the department is rolling out right now is how schools will be reporting on their use of funds for the institutional share. And what we learned yesterday through a webinar that the Department of Ed. Hosted for stakeholders. So I'm not sure exactly how many institutions or who the parties were, who were on this webinar, is that this process is moving. The reporting process for the institutional share is moving and it's moving very quickly. They rolled out at the end of September, a draft form that institutions would complete and post to their website.

Karen McCarthy:

They want it to be on the same website where they are reporting on their student share. And it was a draft form. It was also emailed to all grantees. So depending on who you listed as your contact people, when you did all of that through grants.gov, I imagine that's who got the draft form back in September, the Department of Ed applied for emergency clearance of that form with ONB, and apparently that clearance was approved because on the 13th, which was two days ago, they posted the final form onto their HERF reporting webpage, which I think is a new webpage. As I mentioned last week, they seem to keep shifting where things go on their website. They did not, as far as we could tell, put out any announcement when they posted that. So the first time that we had heard that the form was finalized was during this webinar yesterday. Another key point is they did make some changes from the draft to the final.

Karen McCarthy:

So even if schools had looked at the draft and were starting to pull together some information, you couldn't and shouldn't submit that draft form. So you do need to go back and take a look at that final form that they just rolled out yesterday. As far as we know, they haven't yet posted anything on IFAP. So hopefully by the time you all hear this, there will be some further announcements about that. The first report though is due right now as of October 30th. So that's about two weeks away, which is not very much time for schools to turn this around, get all of the form populated and get it posted onto their public webpage.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. So a couple things first, do we have an idea about enforcement? So schools post this on their webpage. Are they supposed to notify the department or is it the department coming, knocking to find out, or what's the enforcement mechanism?

Karen McCarthy:

They haven't said anything at all about enforcement. It was not mentioned during the webinar at all yesterday. Kind of interesting is that after school started posting their student grant reports onto their webpages, I think people in the started to look for those to check for compliance. And the Department of Ed was also frantically looking to see if schools did this and the only way they were doing it was going to the institutional website and trying to find it. And it seems that the department got tired of doing that work because during the webinar yesterday, they asked that institutions email them.

Karen McCarthy:

They have a website, herfreporting@ed.gov, email them a link to their page where they will be making these public reports. And they also on that HERF reporting webpage that we just learned about yesterday, they posted a spreadsheet that has all of the schools and the web pages that they are aware of. So that must be all the schools that they went out and checked for the reports, but that spreadsheet is out there. They did say they will be updating it as they hear from schools. And that's all that I know on that.

Justin Draeger:

So let me just make sure I have this straight. So seven months ago we passed the CARES Act and in the CARES Act were reporting requirements. Then six months later, the Department of Education, so this would have been at the end of September, they say, "Here's a draft of what we want you to report on the institutional share." Then two weeks after that, they say, "Here's the final draft." And it has changes from the... "Here's the final version," and this is different in some ways from the draft they released at the end of September, and after six and a half months, they gave schools two weeks to do the reporting.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. That's what we were talking about.

Justin Draeger:

Do I have that right?

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, they've been using seven months to come up with the process. And now here it is and schools have two weeks to turn it around.

Justin Draeger:

I think this is the stuff where schools are like, "I don't know whether to laugh or cry at this point." Now I'm wondering the draft form, how complicated is it, or the final form, I guess that was released this last week?

Karen McCarthy:

It's a table you have to categorize, they're basically collecting information about how you used all of your institutional funds. So I think it will be easy for some schools and more complicated for others.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. And some schools might make it more complicated than others because all money... I think we talked about this before. Jeff Baker talked about a dollar's a dollar, all money is fungible and there was wide latitude with the institutional share, right? They could have spent it on students. They could have spent it to shore up operations related to COVID-19 disruptions.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. There are different rules, though, for each of the buckets for the institutional share member, there's the A1 and for the A1 bucket in the CARES Act, you could not use that for certain things that had a little bit more restrictions on the use of funds and then the A2 bucket and the A3. So the FIPSE money, the money that went to minority serving institutions, those, they had a lot more latitude in terms of the use of those funds. And they're reporting all of those differently in this form that they posted.

Justin Draeger:

So people can go out and we'll link in the show notes to the Department of Education's reporting webpage. And we put this notice, I think out this morning in today's news. So people can check that out. Bringing back a little bit to our what was that? I have a closer view of my kids' educations than I've ever had before because they're all doing virtual school at home. My daughter received in one of her business classes a slide that told her how to do a professional email. And I don't know, Karen, with your child, if you've like... Kids don't know how to like email, they can text, they can do comments. They do all sorts of different social media platforms. But emails to them are like, they can't grasp...

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. We were talking about how they learn to text before they email, which is the opposite of how we did it.

Justin Draeger:

Right. Well, and then how we grew up was actually writing out long form letters and then trying to condense those into emails.

Allie Arcese:

And typing class.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. That's right.

Justin Draeger:

So I was looking at this slide though, and I sent it around to you all because I'm curious. This is how our kids are learning to do email. This is like from a business class in high school. Was there anything in here that you agreed with and disagreed with? And to me, there were a couple of things that maybe weren't quite up-to-date. Megan, how about you? Anything you saw in there that raised your eyebrows for a second?

Megan Coval:

Yeah. I felt like avoiding "hello" and "hi." They were saying everything had to be very formal, like "dear" or "Miss" or "Mrs." or "Mr." which I think is appropriate sometimes. But I also think you can do the "hello" and "hi" and still be professional.

Justin Draeger:

There's a practical nature to this that's missing, which is everybody receives 2 billion emails a month. And so when I see something that's like, "dear sir" or "to whom it may concern."

Allie Arcese:

You're like delete.

Megan Coval:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

You don't know. In fact, marketers have wrote me in when they're like, "Hi Justin, it's been a while." And then I read on and I'm like, "Wait a minute. This is a marketing email. I don't even know you." Anyway. Alright. I'm with you on that one. I feel like it's okay to be a little bit more casual.

Megan Coval:

Even emojis is fine. I think sometimes.

Justin Draeger:

Well, it did say no emojis.

Allie Arcese:

I think this depends on the context of what professional setting. Cause is an email between coworkers still considered professional? Probably.

Justin Draeger:

For HR purposes, always.

Allie Arcese:

In that situation, maybe you can use emojis depending on how well, how closely you work with that person. But if you're sending it outside of your organization, probably drop the emojis.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. I wonder though, Allie, cause like a smile, there's no way to convey sarcasm in written text. And so in some ways I feel like the smile is like, "Hey, I'm joking" or "I'm being light here."

Allie Arcese:

Well, are you using sarcasm that often when you're...

Justin Draeger:

It's my love language. It's the only way I know how to communicate.

Karen McCarthy:

Even outside the office?

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. I don't know. I use I've used emojis professionally for a long time.

Allie Arcese:

Again. I think it depends on your relationship with the person you're emailing, but if you're making initial contact with someone outside your organization. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Maybe not. That's fair. Anything else that you saw Allie, that you would disagree with? That seemed a little outmoded?

Allie Arcese:

The sign-off, like only saying sincerely or respectfully. I think we're past that.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. It's sometimes it's a little more like... I think they're teaching them a little too rigid.

Allie Arcese:

You know what I felt deeply was the comment about font. Because if someone sends me an email using comic Sans, like, "oof."

Justin Draeger:

Is anybody doing that? I felt like that's pretty standard, but occasionally you'll get one. Here's the biggest thing I struggle with. When you are posting something in our all staff channel or to a lot of people, how are you referring to everybody? Are you saying "guys," are you saying "team?" Are you saying "colleagues," or do you just not even address it?

Allie Arcese:

If I say anything, I just say, "Hi everyone."

Karen McCarthy:

I use "hi all" sometimes.

Justin Draeger:

You don't use, "Hey y'all" or anything like that, you stick to just "hi all."

Megan Coval:

I do guys with our team. I'm like, "Hey guys," or "gang." I say "gang" to our team a lot.

Justin Draeger:

I use gang quite a bit and I use "team," but that starts to feel a little, I don't know, maybe it feels a little outdated.

Allie Arcese:

You know, what was the most aggressive type of email I've gotten before was I had this boss who wouldn't even write an email. He would put the entire thing in the subject line.

Justin Draeger:

How can you even read that?

Allie Arcese:

It was never a long message. It was just like, "Can you do this?" or "Come to this like conference room" and then I would open the email and be like, "Well..."

Justin Draeger:

Nothing was there. It was all in the subject line.

Megan Coval:

I know somebody who does that. And it's often long. Karen, you probably know. And it'll be like two sentences. Like, "What did you think about the recent department announcement?" And then you open it and it's like, "Call me."

Karen McCarthy:

Yes, I do get those too.

Megan Coval:

I do have a funny email story about Justin though. When I first started here, we were communicating over Gmail. Cause I hadn't... Before I started, when I had just gotten a job and shortly thereafter, my email got hacked, my Gmail, and sent out a dirty message to most of my contacts. I remember like R-rated. I was mortified and cause I had emailed basically everybody on the team. And I remember I sent Justin a note.

Megan Coval:

I was like, "Dear Justin," I just went back and looked at it in this morning. Cause it's a mindset. And I was like, "I just wanted to let you know that if you received an email from me with a certain web address, it wasn't me. And I always remember this cause Justin just wrote back and he was like the first thing he said, he was like, "Ha ha," like he wasn't even like, "No, I didn't get that."

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, that wasn't very sensitive Justin.

Megan Coval:

No. I mean, I took it as like, "Oh he's cool." Like he thinks it's funny and he was very light about it. And that signaled to me, like I remember that, thinking that was one of my first impressions, like, "Oh, okay." He doesn't take himself too seriously.

Justin Draeger:

That's good. Yeah. I don't remember the email. I'm glad I wasn't like, "Send me the email. I didn't see it," but...

Karen McCarthy:

I don't remember ever getting anything Megan, if that makes you feel better.

Megan Coval:

But I just love it. I always remember that. That's my first glimpse into Justin's personality that he was like, "Haha."

Justin Draeger:

That's probably literally what I did. I laughed out loud when I got the email and I'm just thinking, "I didn't get it, but I wished I had."

Megan Coval:

But that made a good impression. That's where informal is good.

Justin Draeger:

You know what? I sort of feel like you can't cover up who you are. And so your communications have to reflect who you are and overall I'm a pretty casual person. So, keep it casual. Alright. Folks who want to send us along any comments do's and don'ts of emails. Always love to hear them send them along. And that wraps up another edition of Off the Cuff. Thanks everybody for joining us. Remember, send us your comments. Remember to subscribe, tell a friend. Maybe we'll see you again next time.