

# NASFAA's "Director Download" Episode 7 Transcript

- Justin Draeger: Hey, everyone. Welcome to another edition of "Director Download." I am Justin Draeger.
- Beth Maglione: Beth Maglione, with NASFAA.
- Jim Kennedy: Jim Kennedy from Indiana University.
- Andrew Hammontree: Andrew Hammontree from Francis Tuttle Technology Center.
- Justin Draeger: Welcome, Jim and Andrew. We're glad that you could join us. Today we are going to be talking about communicating up, specifically, but before we get into that, let's talk a little bit about you two. So Jim, how long have you been at Indiana?
- Jim Kennedy: Thirteen years.
- Justin Draeger: Okay, 13 years. And before that?
- Jim Kennedy: A wide variety of different places. I've been at the University of Minnesota, Emory University, and North Dakota State University.
- Justin Draeger: And how long have you been in financial aid?
- Jim Kennedy: Oh, jeez, 25 plus years.
- Justin Draeger: All right. And at Indiana, you are in the system office?
- Jim Kennedy: Correct.
- Justin Draeger: So talk to us about the structure of what you oversee.
- Jim Kennedy: Sure. So it's university student services and systems. We provide support for all seven campuses, 100,000 students, basically in the areas of admissions, financial aid, student records, bursar operation, veteran services, but we focus a lot of the financial aid pieces.
- Justin Draeger: Yeah. So your background is in financial aid, you oversee financial aid, along with other departments on campus, and you're also then working up with your president and your provost, and coordinating all of that.
- Jim Kennedy: Absolutely. So, any issues that come up around financial aid specifically usually come down and we handle them in our organization, we work with all the campuses.

Justin Draeger: Andrew, tell us about your history in financial aid and-

Andrew Hammontree: Well, I've been at Francis Tuttle Technology Center for about 12 years now. Before that, I was at a very traditional liberal arts university. I started as a student worker, so I've been in financial aid for about 21 years now. I never thought I would stay that long. I was an English major, though, so I needed a job-

Justin Draeger: Right.

Andrew Hammontree: Before I graduated.

Justin Draeger: But you use English every day.

Andrew Hammontree: I use that undergraduate degree all the time, yes, that critical thinking they taught me, I use it constantly.

Justin Draeger: And just tell us about Francis Tuttle, like what's your office, your student size?

Andrew Hammontree: Well, we have about ... We were actually created to serve the high school students. In Oklahoma, we have a large vocational system and so we were designed to help high school students, but we're also open to post-secondary students, as well. We have about between 12 and 1,300 post-secondary students. It's close to 100 certificate programs. It's all at the certificate level, so every GE-

Justin Draeger: It's GE all the time. Wow.

Andrew Hammontree: Gainful employment is my life. That's why I have about five people that report to me, because it's also clock hour.

Justin Draeger: Oh, boy.

Andrew Hammontree: So, there's a lot more work involved with the clock hour and the gainful employment stuff. So I'm very involved in a lot of enrollment issues, as well as financial aid. I feel like my office spends probably about half their time trying to figure out where is the student at in their program. And then we also serve veterans in my office. So it's more than just financial aid, although that's our bread and butter.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. All right. So both of you oversee a lot of folks so you experience people communicating up to you. Beth, in our office, as executive vice president, you're getting a lot of people reporting up to you and then all of us are making reports to presidents and boards of trustees and potentially donors and alumnae. So ever since I got into financial aid, and I still hear it to this day, financial aid offices in particular often feel or say they feel unheard on campus or maybe aren't given their due. And I'm sure you guys wouldn't necessarily say that, but

maybe places you've worked or witnessed. I'm curious. Why do you think that is? Why do you think the financial aid office, maybe compared to other offices, has such a hard time getting their voice heard on campus?

Andrew Hammontree: I think there's a lot of frustration whenever they ask the financial aid administrator to come forward and talk about what's going on in the office. It's not the most interesting subject. And I think one area where we struggle with financial aid is that we sometimes get too deep into the weeds. And I find that when I'm talking to my administration, I'm going to capture their attention so much better if I talk at their level. Talk strategically and show them, this is how it connects with all the other departments on campus.

They're not interested in my day to day work, they see that as my job. But they want to see, can I think strategically, can I see how this connects with all the other areas on campus. How does this fit with the mission of the institution? How does it fit with the core values, the vision, and how does it fit in with strategic thinking? And if I approach it from that direction, they seem to be a lot more receptive to what I have to say. Otherwise, they would just shut me out, because they don't want to hear me quote CFRs. It's not the most interesting thing to talk about.

Justin Draeger: Right. And I think there might be an under-appreciation. Everybody's busy on campus, but there might be an under-appreciation for the amount of, even at a small campus, and maybe even more so at a small campus, because a president has to wear so many hats, but the amount, just sheer amount of stuff that a college president today has to oversee and the amount of personal risk and liability they take on, for anything that could go wrong on the campus anywhere. And while clearly, like financial aid is such a huge part of any campus's operations, it's one of many. And so that sort of understanding to me as I've worked with presidents is like, let me just hit the bullets. Let me get the high points. Are there mistakes that you think aid administrators are making when they approach their administrations that they're feeling unheard or shut out? Are there common pieces that they ought to be focusing on?

Jim Kennedy: Well, I think the strategic piece is very important, just like Andrew said. I mean, people focus on compliance, they talk about the service. I mean, those are expected from financial aid offices, but what are you as a financial aid administrator doing to move the institution forward? And I think that it plays a very, very critical role. How are you going to use those funds strategically? I think that is what the executives really want to focus on.

Beth Maglione: Yeah. You know, one thing, I have not worked on campus, but even here at NASFAA or at other jobs I've held, I think one thing is to be the person who brings the solutions and doesn't just bring all the problems and, of course, to do that you've got to know what the question is at hand. So, there's this piece of putting yourself in your higher ups shoes and saying, "what are they grappling with? What's the problem they're trying to solve? What's the piece of this I can bring? Oh, and also, getting my own goals met at the same time for our

department.” And that takes a lot of prep, probably in advance, to develop trust so you're even at those right meetings.

Andrew Hammontree: I think it's so important to know the key players. Know what their communication style is. We produce a FAFSA in Spanish for our students that don't speak English as their first language, but the questions are the same as the question on the English version of the FAFSA. And we have to do the same thing when we talk to leaders at our institutions. We have to communicate to them at their level, so figure out what it is that's important to them. So when I'm talking to my business office people, I'm going to talk one way and then if I'm talking to IT, it's a different conversation. But I'm getting at the same thing.

I find that with my direct supervisor, for example, she was a former guidance counselor and so she wants me to make the stories personal. So I may talk about things at a high level, but when I'm talking about regulations, she's interested in that. But it doesn't resonate with her-

Justin Draeger: She needs you to tell a story. It's like this-

Andrew Hammontree: She needs me to tell the story. When I say, “this is what will happen to this student,” that gets her attention. So we're getting to the same thing, but you just communicate it in a different way, so that they are more receptive to it.

Beth Maglione: So what you just pointed to is sort of like you know her communication style.

Andrew Hammontree: Yes.

Beth Maglione: You've learned that, probably maybe the hard way even like this is what she likes-

Andrew Hammontree: Yes, because-

Beth Maglione: As opposed to what I was giving her.

Andrew Hammontree: And it's very different than my style.

Beth Maglione: Yeah.

Andrew Hammontree: So, you can't assume that everybody's going to communicate the same way as you do. I think I'm just so logical. Everybody should communicate the same way that I do, but I find that I don't get the results from people unless I talk to them at their level.

Beth Maglione: And so Justin and I were talking a little bit about this before the podcast. He said, “I think it's good that people would speak ... know that they should speak to their boss in bullet points.” And I said, “well, you know you like bullet points and I know that about you now, so I always give you bullet points,” but I have

had other bosses who loved the narrative and the storytelling and the context and the, you know, so there's some of that, like to be heard you have to speak the right language.

Jim Kennedy:

And I think you really have to, just like we were talking about, is understand your boss. What's the style? Some of the people I've worked for right away, in the morning, they're ready to go. They want to hear all about it. My current person, I report to executive vice president, he's going all the time. But getting a hold of them later on in the day is a much better way to get and talk about issues at that point. And then finding out what is the best way to do that. I like putting together a set of bullet points that are the very key things we want to talk about in our half hour meeting we have every two weeks. And I think that's important to have that time to go through those but as we know, every day in the NASFAA news always replaces, there's a ton of things you could talk about.

What are the important pieces you really want to get across? And I think it's a great opportunity to show the success, the things you're doing in your office that are really having an impact and a lot of is data. How can you put that data together to show these are the successes we're having in our office, here's how we're helping these students, here's how we're part of the solution to get students through to graduation.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. So, there's a couple things in there that we've touched on. One is, Jim, you just mentioned like late in the day, this is the idea of like I deliver information or convey or make an ask when they're prepared to receive it. So part of that's getting to know them, like they're in a receiving mode versus they just came out of a meeting where it was really stressful and they're a little frazzled and they're not ready to hear because they're dealing with something else. So part of it is the receiving end and then the other piece that we sort of touched on a little bit has to do with when you figuring out like the successes you've had, so you are sort of feeding your boss or your president, success stories that they can convey. You're setting them up for success to say, here are the things that you should highlight.

Let's talk strategy for a second. How do you go about, if you're, let's say you're new, how do you go about finding out the communication style that your boss is or when they're most likely to receive it? Like you just start shooting in the dark. What strategies have you guys employed?

Andrew Hammontree:

Well, it was trial and error for me when I was new because I didn't know the personalities of the people, but I find that the more meetings that I go to, the better I come accustomed to their leadership style, their communication style. But there was a lot of trial and error and I learned some hard lessons by approaching things the wrong way. But once you develop relationships with people you get used to their moods, their initiatives that are important to them, and you figure out what it is ... what's the key for that person that's going to make them listen to you.

Jim Kennedy: Yeah, I totally agree. And I think just sitting down and talking through the style, you know, how that's going to work and then I think being connected to other people at the university, you know, how can I, who should I talk to about some of the academic side, how we're going to coordinate date together, am I going to talk to that person? Are we going to do it together? Government relations is another big piece of it that we talked to a lot. How are we going to coordinate that? And hopefully you will work through with your boss the best way to do those things and find out exactly what he wants to hear about he or she wants to hear about as well. I mean, do they want to hear about all the problems with all the governmental relation issues or they want to hear more about what's happening at the campus. I kind of gauge that a little bit to see exactly what I want to put in those bullet points every two weeks to talk through. Now obviously if there's problems, we got to bring those up to the boss.

Justin Draeger: Because the worst thing is to be surprised nobody wants ... even if it's a good surprise, like people, managers, those of us even in this room, nobody likes surprises.

Jim Kennedy: Right.

Justin Draeger: And you don't want to be surprised at a meeting or caught off guard somewhere.

Jim Kennedy: But again, we don't want to do is go in there and talk about, you know, ISIR load and we had this problem with these 10 students. I mean, the executives don't want to hear that either. So even though it's important for our offices, you know, we're trying to work through compliance and making sure these things are working correctly. So that's something that I do spend time on going through and finding even with my staff, where are we really want to talk and get across and I think that has worked well. And then having that bullet points on a paper that I delivered to him in advance, well he'll write different pieces or follow up items and he has that. I think that that has worked very well for us.

Justin Draeger: Right. So it's a leave behind that's not very different from how we work with Congress. You give something and then-

Jim Kennedy: Right, it's a leave behind that they can make notes on.

Andrew Hammontree: And another approach I've learned the hard way is to not go in there and start venting. I find that if I go in there and then they just get worked up and there's no solution at the end of the meeting, now everybody is mad. So it's important to go in there with the right tone, set the right professional tone so that you can have an actual conversation and reach some solution. And I go in there with options, I never go into a meeting and say, here's the problem, now fix it. I always say, here are some options. And I defer to them for their expertise to figure out what is the best solution for this situation.

Justin Draeger: So most I would say most leaders want to remove obstacles for their employees. Presidents want to make life easier. They might not have the bandwidth, they might not have the tools because they don't know your department as well as they might otherwise if they come up that way. So giving them, teeing up for them, like here's a challenge. Now here's some two or three solutions allows them to then clear log jam. I would say one of the biggest strategic mistakes I've seen for people who come to me, even who are communicating up is if people bring a problem without the solution. It's sort of like this, it feels like maybe it's delegating up when really it's like our problem. So what is the common solution here? And I assume we've all found more success. You found more success delivering options as opposed to just here are the problems, good luck sort of thing.

Jim Kennedy: Absolutely. I think you have to continue to do that and working well together with the other areas at the university when you come with these problems, you know, for instance, working with admissions and student records and you know, the are Bursar student financials folks working through some of these issues, I think with solutions when you bring these forward is very appreciated.

Justin Draeger: Okay. Let me, pose an example here. Okay. Let's say that you are overseeing an aid office and that aid office is understaffed and under resourced and they need an additional FTE or some sort of outlet. Okay. Something's not getting done and there might be a compliance issue. What would be your advice to them to communicate that up? How do they go about trying to be heard and fix that, that particular issue?

Andrew Hammontree: Well, I know my administration responds to numbers. They want data. If I go in there and start talking about my feelings, they're not interested. They want to see numbers.

Justin Draeger: They're interested. Let's say they're interested, but it's not compelling.

Andrew Hammontree: Exactly, exactly. And they want to see data to support the need for another employee. So we would prepare them with charts to show, okay, the enrollment has increased by 50 percent because of whatever reason, maybe the economy is in a downturn and so we are, have a lot more students going back to school for training in another field. Our financial aid applicants that has increased by 20 percent and I can show them that adding another employee would reduce the number of complaints. We would be able to serve more students and it would ultimately help enrollment because that's the bottom line. They want to see how is this going to help enrollment, how is it going to help our students to succeed?

Justin Draeger: So you tie it back into the vision, but you're using literally the vision or mission of the institution or their strategic initiatives, but you're doing it with numbers.

Andrew Hammontree: Yes.

Justin Draeger: Jim?

Jim Kennedy: I think you go in and you talk about the things you've already done in the office; the efficiency gains you've already brought forward. You review, you talk through your staffing levels and you say, here's what we've done and we've done this with technology, we've done this, we've tried to streamline, but we're still short to provide the service we really, really need. We need to have this.

Justin Draeger: So you're showing that you've tried to tackle this issue, they're still an issue that remains and you've taken the steps that you think you can, but you still need some additional help.

Jim Kennedy: Exactly. And think the tool, the NASFAA staffing tool that's out there, there's, you know, you can talk to your colleagues who do that a lot, how many do you have in your office, what's the level of service we need? And we're responsible for this funding that's coming in from the federal state or institutional funds, you know, we have to be good stewards of this money. We need to have these folks in. And I think most, at the university level, they understand the need, the continued need to have financial aid folks to work through these issues. But it can be a resource issue obviously for any place it's going to be a challenge, but I think you just lay that out but again, you show the things that you've already done for efficiency first.

Beth Maglione: I haven't worked in a financial aid office, but I think some of the things that you both just said really are applicable in any sort of organization and I could say like what you're talking about here is making an ask of your manager. Right? So one little mental tool that I've used as sort of to come and say, here's the best case scenario under our current conditions, here's the worst case scenario. Maybe somewhere between is the most likely scenario, but you're the risk manager. You tell me what level of risk do you want to assume as the face of this organization?

Justin Draeger: Yeah, I think that's a good way to look at it because all boards of trustees or directors and then by extension, the presidents that sit on those boards are primarily concerned with two things. Well, I don't want to boil it down to two things, but obviously the mission, but the two things that they're constantly assessing and they use auditors for this, they used their management team, they're assessing financial risk and they're assessing reputational risk. And to the extent that you can tie back, like we have a reputational problem if we fall down on this issue that we'll get into the press, that's bad news for us and if you can quantify the reputational risk. And then on the other side we have a vice president of enrollment management who is now retired, a former national chair who was unusually candid with her administration. She was fond of saying, if we screw up big enough in my office, we will shut this institution down. Now, I'm not saying that's the strategy you should pursue.

Beth Maglione: I've heard another national chair of reference, if we mess up, its orange jumpsuits for everyone. Shock and awe.

Justin Draeger: I'm not that saying you should pursue that strategy. But the point was she was getting at the financial risk, which is there are millions of dollars at stake. And then if you talk about it ... she would talk about like there's cash management provisions like we might be on reimbursement if we don't get this taken care of. It's this idea of speaking to the language that your administration is concerned with, which is usually their mission strategic plans, but then reputational risk, financial risk and that's just due diligence on behalf of a board.

So, all right, let's talk through the mechanics of you have bad news. Okay?

Jim Kennedy: Okay.

Justin Draeger: You have bad news that you are bringing to your administration. Maybe it's a program review finding that's resulted in a cash penalty to the institution. Maybe it's, you're going to be put on cash management, maybe something HR related, but you have bad news to bring to your administration. Walk me through how you communicate that up in an effective way.

Andrew Hammontree: I'm going to want to have face to face communication. That's not-

Justin Draeger: This isn't a late-night email?

Andrew Hammontree: That is not an email that I would want to send out. Of course I'm sure they're going to have a lot of questions and I want to be able to kind of read the body language and see the facial expressions, the look of panic in their eyes, so I'm going to want to see the person face to face. I would set up a meeting with that person and go through them and show them why this happened, how we can avoid it in the future, and where do we go from here. What are our options now? How do we fix this? If it's something that we can fix, what's the game plan?

Jim Kennedy: I would hope that your boss would see the need for critical issues that come up, that you need to see the person right away. So again, if you're constantly contacting your boss with a wide variety of issues-

Justin Draeger: This is like the crying wolf thing, like you have to be careful. You're not constantly crying wolf.

Jim Kennedy: Exactly, but for something like this is-

Justin Draeger: This is acute.

Jim Kennedy: I would call and say, I need to see you right away and I would go over it just like Andrew said and I would talk through the issue and look at next steps and I think anybody's boss should be really respectful of that because it creates a lot of stress on a lot of different people when these things come up. But again, you have to gauge, I think the overall risk and what you want to do with these things

because sometimes things come up that you think, oh, this is really a huge problem and is it really, is it really the biggest problem now a program review? Yes. Or some kind of audit finding. Yes, that would be. But I think working through those, just like we talked about before and having a solution to those problems and what we're going to do with it is, very helpful when you're talking through these and having somebody that's very supportive because these kinds of things do happen with financial aid.

Justin Draeger: Right. This gets back to the trusted. Maybe the idea of being a trusted advisor. In every organization, one of our experts talked about, is this idea of an inner circle and an outer circle. And sometimes it follows formal organizational structures and sometimes it doesn't. People need trusted advisors at all levels of an organization including the university and if you're a trusted advisor, you're going to reflect calm and forward thinking and solutions-based conversations as opposed to panic or anxiety or I don't know what we're going to do sort of thing. That sort of instills confidence I would think, as opposed to I've got a problem every single day. I'm constantly bringing these problems to you. I'm blowing. I might not have an appropriate size of the actual problem. These are the things I'm thinking of it in terms of trusted advisor.

Jim Kennedy: I would hope that the financial aid director at the campus would be the go-to for financial aid issues. I think that really works well. If that person is excluded from the conversations, I think it really hurts the communication stream. I think the financial aid director needs to be part of any of these pieces around student funding and be at the table. I think it's very, very important. Otherwise, again, I think you run into a lot of communication problems, especially if the president or vice president is asking other people about funding issues or financial aid. Financial aid it's very complicated and then you get off on these other entities, other problems where maybe some miscommunication is happening that you have to react to. So I think developing that relationship with your executives that you are the go to is very important.

Justin Draeger: I worry sometimes. So, you know, innovative learning models, prior assessments, all these modules, these are things that for most schools, traditional schools, these are conversations are happening and if I'm an aid director and I don't know that these conversations are happening... like I almost feel 100 percent positive in saying they're happening now. Whether you're a part of the conversations or not might be the bigger question. And I think a lot of times that financial aid folks may feel like they are the people who have to say no, people want to do something out of the box. You've looked at the regulation and you're saying, you know, that this is rife with problems like this is going to be a real challenge, but always being the no person might leave you out of the conversations. So how do you make sure your school is in compliance, but you are also seen as working with folks. Does that make sense? Is that resonating?

Andrew Hammontree: Absolutely. I know that those conversations are happening at my school. We pride ourselves on being innovative and we're looking at things like

competency-based education because we want to find innovative ways to help students get an education. And one of my great frustrations and the great frustrations of my administration is that the Higher Education Act just has not kept up with the times, it's antiquated in a lot of ways and they get very, very frustrated by that. And one thing I tell them is that financial aid will put us in a box, but it's my job to help them find a bigger box. Yes, it's going to put us in a box, but maybe I can find a bigger box and will have to live within that box, but at least it's a bigger box than the one that we were in previously.

Jim Kennedy: And I think it's really important when you're in these conversations as a financial aid director to not be the person that always says no, I think you have to listen and work through the strategies because what will happen is if you go to the meetings and you're dealing especially with academic leadership and you're always the person saying nope, those regulations won't allow that. That's not going to happen. No, no, no, no. At some point they are going to exclude you from the conversations. So I think it's good to go there and you can say what the regulations are and talk through those issues which are very, very important, but it's the style and how you're doing it. And I think those things are all coming, Justin. I think what you mentioned those are going to be key points that are going to be coming up. But if you go to every meeting and just say no because of compliance and regulations and those are important. We are not saying we can do these things, but it's the style and I think that's when we have to work through.

Justin Draeger: So Andrew talked about making a bigger box, the style, it's that you are on board with their vision and it's sort of like, I'm here for you. Let me figure out how we can do this. Even if you're 90 percent sure right then that this isn't going to work. At least the way they're envisioning it, it's sort of like I'm going to play ball with you. I almost look at it like kids on a playground, they want to toss the ball around. Some kids won't play ball with you, other kids will toss it around. I used to say to staff like, just, just toss the ball around with me for a minute. Let's just play catch. And we'll see. Maybe it won't go anywhere, but it's them feeling like you're a part of what they're trying to do, as opposed to the opposition to what they're trying to do.

Jim Kennedy: And is there any other things we can look at? I mean, is it, you know, we use a traditional semester format, is there sessions within the semester we could take a look at it or something else we can do, looking at that, talking to your colleagues, asking questions about it. Maybe you could be the person that actually can help them model, move forward in some cases. Not in all those things you mentioned, but I just think it's important that listening and try to be helpful versus always going to the regulation, say no, nothing, none of these are going to move forward.

Justin Draeger: They'll feel confident that you're going to explore every avenue that if there's a way Andrew or Jim, they're going to find a way for us to be able to do this.

Andrew Hammontree: And sometimes the regulations do allow us options. And I think sometimes people just say no because that's the easiest thing to say for them, but you're not seen as a team player when you do that and you will be shut out of the conversation. So as a consequence of that, so it's important not to say no all the time, be honest, be genuine, tell them the truth. If something's not possible, let them know that but then start looking at other options. This opportunity to bring forth positive solutions.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. When I've been, I've occasionally in other positions found myself not in that inner circle. You can say like, well structurally I should be in these conversations or this is what management should be doing. It doesn't change the what is. And so really the only thing that I can control is what I'm doing to try to bring myself into those conversations. So. Alright, I want to go to what advice you'd give to people who are bringing you issues. All three of you are in positions where you have direct reports. What advice or even maybe if we look at the mistakes, what advice or mistakes do you see people who are bringing you issues? What advice would you give to someone who's maybe newer in their career or looking to communicate effectively with you? What do you see that people might want to pay more attention to?

Beth Maglione: Yeah. You mentioned the boy who cried wolf and I would just phrase it as, pick your battles wisely. I often say to my staff, okay, I'll help you with this. Is this the hill you want to die on? And like, you know, the answer often is no. Okay. To use too many metaphors, keep your powder dry on this one. Like let's make sure we know when we really want to go full force on topic to really make change, to make it happen, to correct an error. Whatever the issue is that trying to deal with. Is this the thing that you want to waste your political capital on because it's finite. You can't go before the board or before the president or whomever with every issue that comes up. So I'll help you solve your problem, just make sure it's the problem you want me to help you solve.

Jim Kennedy: The question I always ask is what is the impact? I mean, if for any issue, what is the impact? And again, I want to hear about the issues, but an impact that for five students is much different than one for 20,000 students. So what is the overall impact and what we have to do. So before, I mean, I want to know about what happened, but if you come in the office constantly with these issues, without the impact and of course there's issues that are more severe than others. But you know, you hear something like that from a system that, hey, we looked at this one student and they didn't get their loan this semester, right?

Justin Draeger: And you have 100,000 students in the system.

Jim Kennedy: Exactly. So, okay, how many others? What are the data points you can show? So I think that that's an important piece. The data kind of drives the issue in many cases, so that I would say when you find an issue, if you can do you have any data points you can bring for the overall impact dollars or students? I think that's very important.

Andrew Hammontree: I always tell my new hires that I'm very, very forgiving of mistakes, but I'm not forgiving of laziness. I always want to see them try mistakes or learning opportunities, but I always want them to do their homework before they come to me with questions. I've given them a lot of resources. They've got the FSA handbook, they've got the policies and procedures manual. There's a lot of questions they need to ask themselves before they come to me. Otherwise, they'd be at my door every five minutes because it's just so much easier to go to your boss because you're stuck on something, but I want to, I want them to use their critical thinking.

I had a professor in college who would never answer questions. If a student asked him a question, he would start asking them questions.

Justin Draeger: This is the liberal arts part.

Beth Maglione: It's the Socratic Method.

Andrew Hammontree: See what it's done to me, so I do the same thing with them, but that's how they learn is by actually digging a little deeper and then they find out all kinds of other things while they're looking for the answer to that issue. They'll find out all other kinds of things and then they come to me and say, oh, I just came across this. Isn't this interesting? And this is a great learning opportunity for them, but I want to see them try. That's very important to me.

Justin Draeger: My one piece that I would try to advise folks is always think about the end of what you're trying to accomplish. What are the asks? I rarely go into a conversation with a complaint or an issue or a challenge without knowing exactly what I'm going to be asking for. So it allows me to be much more strategic. It also, sometimes I'll be listening to somebody unload something or a challenge they're having. I've already accepted that there's a challenge. I'm thinking like what is it, how can I help? And if you don't have that locked and loaded and ready to go, then you're not really provided a decision point which gets back to, I think, almost everything all three of you said you have to come in strategically.

Beth Maglione: Yeah. That's a challenge and I don't know, you know, your organizations, how flat or hierarchical things are, but here we have a very flat organization. A very, I think casual way of dealing with one another and I think that folks can feel very comfortable just popping in and saying, oh my God, this thing is such and such and so and so, maybe not realizing that the managers thinking, is this a problem? Do you need my help? Tell me what I can do. And they may even say that in the person just says, oh, well, I was just blowing off some steam. I think because we've been talking about here since the beginning, be strategic about when you blow off steam, your boss wants to hear problems and certainly not have surprises.

Justin Draeger: And to build a relationship there has to be some proximity, emotional or intimate proximity when you're sharing like, hey, this is what's going on in my life, or boy, this is really challenging. Or you know, my child didn't make the basketball team. But when it comes to the work stuff-

Beth Maglione: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Strategic. So Jim, Andrew, thank you for coming in. If folks want to reach out to you, you're both in the NASFAA directory. Just want to point out to folks, "Director Download" is a podcast we're doing leading up to our leadership and legislative expo. It's going to be here in Washington DC, February 25th through 27th, four different tracks focusing on management, leadership, enrollment management and association management. And Andrew, you're actually working on the curriculum for part of this.

Andrew Hammontree: Yeah, for association management and new and aspiring directors.

Justin Draeger: So come and meet Andrew directly at that event. And thank you both for engaging with NASFAA and being here today.

Jim Kennedy: Thank you.

Andrew Hammontree: Pleasure.

Justin Draeger: Remember to subscribe, tell a friend, follow us on social media, send us your comments. Till next time.