

# NASFAA's "Off the Cuff" Podcast – Episode 236 Transcript

OTC From the Field: Retaining Talent in Your Financial Aid Office

Justin Draeger:

Hey, everybody. Welcome to another edition of Off the Cuff. I'm Justin Draeger. Glad to be talking to you. We normally take the month of August off because schools are very busy, gearing up for fall enrollment and in DC, things tend to slow down. So we have a lot of people that are on vacation and out of the office at NASFAA HQ, but this was such a timely topic we wanted to come back in for a special episode.

Joining me today is Dr. Andy Brantley, who has served as the president and chief executive officer of the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources or CUPA HR. He's been there since July, 2005.

CUPA HR, for those of you who don't know them, they are like the NASFAA for college HR folks. They have 33,000 members from roughly 2000 colleges and universities. Before there, Andy worked in higher ed for a very long time, including as the associate VP and chief human resources officer at University of Georgia, and then director of HR at Davidson College and University of North Carolina at Asheville.

Welcome, Andy, glad to have you here.

Andy Brantley:

Thanks. Great to be here.

Justin Draeger:

Also joining us is Anthony Jones, who many of you know and love. Dr. Jones is the executive director of scholarships and financial aid at the University of Utah. Before then he had worked in institutions in Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, a former NASFAA staff alum, although our time didn't overlap, Anthony, and also worked at the Department of Education, both at FSA and the office of post-secondary education as a policy analyst.

So Anthony, glad to have you here.

Anthony Jones:

Thank you. Glad to be here.

Justin Draeger:

Andy, I often wonder if there's anything in higher education or maybe anywhere that's as Byzantine as student financial aid. And the only thing I can come up with is employment law. So is that fair, there are plenty of things that come out in employment law in higher ed particular I think. I'm so glad that's Andy's issue and not mine.

Andy Brantley:

Oh, thank you so much, Justin. And I appreciate that commiseration.

Justin Draeger:

Do you ever feel the same way about financial aid stuff?

Andy Brantley:

Absolutely. Absolutely. All the commiseration is shared in both directions.

Justin Draeger:

So Andy, we wanted to have you on, because we kind of want to talk about this big issue that's brewing in higher education. We're feeling it acutely in student financial aid, which is staffing shortages, staffing retention issues, and staffing pay issues, all of which kind of boil up into this larger issue of position classifications.

How do we justify what we do? You just completed, CUPA HR just completed its higher education employee retention survey. And maybe we should start there. What's the headline for higher ed and employment?

Andy Brantley:

So at a high level, Justin, the headline is higher education employees are looking for other jobs.

Justin Draeger:

Are those in higher ed or somewhere else? Are they leaving or are they sticking around?

Andy Brantley:

All of the above. So some of it is a desire for more pay. Some of it is related to the opportunity to find more remote work opportunities, more flexible schedules and acknowledgement of their important work and value to the organizations.

Justin Draeger:

And would you say this is this at every level of the institution? We're talking presidents, we're talking provost, we're talking financial aid, business office everywhere?

Andy Brantley:

Every level of the institution. And as we've seen over the last couple of years, mass exodus for a number of reasons, whether it be retirements or resignations or other things that have kind of taken them, not just from higher ed, but in some circumstances, just totally out of the workforce or to an entirely different profession that they might not have even considered pre pandemic.

So all of these things are converging to create some very interesting and challenging retention and recruitment challenges for higher education.

Justin Draeger:

So you've been at CUPA HR for 17 years, if I'm doing my math right.

Andy Brantley:

That's correct.

Justin Draeger:

Is this at proportions that you've not seen before since you've been at the national office?

Andy Brantley:

Absolutely. Unprecedented. And not just since I've been at the national office, but since I've been in higher education overall. So combined on campus and in this role. Unprecedented in every way, shape and form.

Justin Draeger:

So I don't know if any of that makes financial aid administrators feel better or worse, but it sounds like you're saying we're not alone. That this is, I don't know, dare I say, use the word crisis. Is this a crisis at every campus almost or every institution type in every office?

Andy Brantley:

I think it is not farfetched to describe this as a crisis.

Justin Draeger:

Okay.

Andy Brantley:

Another way to think about this, another report, the 2021-22 higher education workforce surveys that we did this year also pointed to turnover of positions overall. So just for exempt staff in general, the turnover across the country was over 15%.

For non-exempt staff, the turnover was over 17%. So kind of put that in perspective, just looking at 2021 versus 21-22, that means that for our exempt staff, one out of every six or seven positions turned over and for our non-exempt staff, one of every six or more turned over just during the last year.

And that is just the last year. We'll be collecting this data again late fall into early spring. And it's going to be very interesting to see to what degree these percentages of turnover hold or if we actually see increases, particularly for certain areas across the country.

Justin Draeger:

So what I'm not hearing you say, though, is do you not expect this to level out? This is going to continue. Maybe it holds at current levels. Maybe we might actually see an increase, but what I didn't hear you say was you expect this to be abated in the next six months.

Andy Brantley:

No, no. I think the trend of turnover, the trend of our challenges retaining key, critically important talent on our campus, those challenges will continue into the foreseeable future. I used to think that I could predict some of these things based on my long tenure in higher education.

I've stopped doing that because it makes no sense to do that. We're kind of dealing with the issues that are front and center and doing our best to prepare for what might be next regarding recruitment and retention.

Justin Draeger:

A lot of the data that we're collecting at NASFAA affirms what you're saying, Andy. From a NASFAA staffing survey this last spring, half of our respondents reported operating at 75% capacity for both the last two award years, which happened to be during the pandemic.

40% of institutions indicated they don't have the resources to maintain administrative capability standards. And that's sort of coded language in financial aid, but basically means that you're concerned that you might not have the resources to be compliant, which then puts your Title IV dollars at risk.

80%, so four out of five said that they were concerned about their ability to be administratively capable in the future. And then over half said, "We don't have staffing levels to adequately serve the students that we have." So it's nice to know we're not necessarily alone in this Andy, but I wonder from the HR perspective, what are the conversations happening at your association, amongst your members?

Some of these things that sounds like we can control. Other things we might not be able to, but what are the solutions we're talking about when it comes to finding and retaining talented people?

Andy Brantley:

So before we explore some of those solutions, which I definitely want to get into, also pointing to that higher education employee retention survey that you reference at the top of the podcast. From that data that we collected, approximately two thirds of full-time employees are working more hours each week than is considered full-time.

Nearly two thirds of higher education employees agreed that they absorbed, like your financial aid colleagues, additional responsibilities from staff who left the institution and nearly three fourths also agreed that they have absorbed additional responsibilities that they feel are somehow pandemic related.

So as we think about all of those as a backdrop that continues to emphasize what you are sharing, one of the things that I have continued to emphasize as I've done presentations around the country during the last year is that we have to reframe our approach to leadership. And part of that means that we have to think about how we create and how we emphasize that we're in an organization that employees need to run to instead of running from.

And there are several things related to that, but really important to this. There was a McKinsey report in September of 21. And from that McKinsey report, 54% of employees who had recently left their jobs didn't feel valued by their managers. So beyond the things we're talking about with the pandemic and changes to work and things like that, 54% said they didn't feel valued by their managers.

52% said they did not feel valued by their organizations and 51% didn't feel a sense of belonging at work. Not a surprise to any of us, for people of color all of those percentages were higher. So as we think about our challenges moving forward, of course we can point to salary and the need to provide salary increases when possible, we need to be mindful of workload and expectations, but we also need to be very, very deliberate in our efforts to recognize employees for their achievements, to invest in their career development, to offer them opportunities for advancement.

On a broader perspective, from an institution wide perspective, we have to, and I'll say this to my HR colleagues across the country, we have to change these antiquated benefit structures that we've created over time that work perfectly if you're a hetero couple with two children, a picket fence and a dog, but don't resonate for the 2022 workforce and all the varying needs and challenges for our workforce plus that factor of being competitive with the private sector.

Justin Draeger:

So let me ask you a question about that two things.

Andy Brantley:

Okay. Great.

Justin Draeger:

Well, one is, it sounds like what I'm hearing you saying is an old adage I've heard, which you always have to take the adages with a grain of salt, which is people don't leave jobs, they leave bad managers. So now I don't want to take shots at managers who may be under their own pressures. They've probably also taken on significant work levels.

Andy Brantley:

Absolutely.

Justin Draeger:

But it sounds like what you're saying is there are accommodations that can be made outside of pay, which is the one we'll talk about in a moment, but outside of pay that can make a meaningful difference in retaining talented people.

Andy Brantley:

Absolutely. And that is such a great summary, Justin. One of the things that we have to remember as we're dealing with all these challenges is that our best employees will probably always have other opportunities. How do these individuals know that their work matters and that they are valued as leaders and individuals?

Part of that is acknowledging adequately with pay. And we're going to talk about position classification to pay in a few minutes. But part of it is at the core, how do these key individuals know that they matter and that their work matters and that they're valued by us as managers and by the organization as a whole?

Justin Draeger:

I think those are really good questions that we probably in this podcast won't have time episode will have time to delve into, but I hear what you're saying which is making people feel valued, making people feel connected.

Besides pay one of the most things I think I saw cited maybe in your survey, it was certainly cited in surveys we've done, which is post pandemic, there is an expectation that people do not need to come into the office five days a week.

How do we accommodate greater work life balance so that people can work somewhat from home, even if they're interacting with students or parents? And I'm wondering, Andy, post pandemic, remote work, at least some remote work where is that on the list of importance from staff?

Andy Brantley:

It is. And this was also part of our employee retention survey. For many of our institution leaders, there is a disconnect between the reality of what the 2022 workforce is expecting in terms of flexibility and remote options and their perceived notion of what the campus culture is and how that is intrinsically linked to everyone sitting in their chair, 8:00 to 5:00 Monday through Friday, regardless of whether or not they ever interact with a student or others.

So that disconnect will continue to be part of the challenge that we face as leaders throughout the campus. And part of that challenge is helping presidents, provost, and others understand and acknowledge that culture is created in lots of different ways and does not always translate to everyone

being in their seat, in their chair on campus 8:00 to 5:00 Monday through Friday or whatever that definition is for your campus.

Justin Draeger:

And Andy, your organization has gone mostly remote. NASFAA has gone mostly remote. It does require intentionality. It does require a change in your processes to maintain culture, but I think we can both attest it's possible, but it just doesn't happen naturally. It does require forethought, strategy, all of those things.

Andy Brantley:

Absolutely. It requires forethought. It requires strategy. It requires a different approach to create the culture that is in some ways harder, in some ways easier, but we have to acknowledge that that is such an important part of what we're creating overall.

Not just the culture for our employees, but the culture for the students on our campus and the culture for our students is impacted by remote and in person and virtual work overall. But it doesn't mean that it is negatively impacted. And I think that's something that we also have to embrace and acknowledge.

Justin Draeger:

Let's turn our attention for a moment to the position classification. While you were at UGA, you and your HR colleagues there implemented a new employee position classification system that impacted ... UGA's a pretty big school, 7,000 employees. And I've heard you describe a very antiquated out date classification system.

And sometimes a position in financial aid, and I think for our members, a source of frustration, is classified at the same level as other campus positions. When from the financial aid perspective, we think that don't require the same amount of specific knowledge and potential risk for the institution that a financial aid counselor for example carries.

So I wonder, Andy, can you talk broadly about ideally what goes into a classification system? So those of us in the aid office, we can know how to talk to HR about properly classifying our positions.

Andy Brantley:

Absolutely. So let's start with some general framing of position classification overall, and it's meant to create some level of uniformity and equity across the organization, and also a way to not just adequately describe the positions within the organization, but to do a good job of comparing them with external benchmarks.

So similar positions at other institutions or organizations outside of higher education. So it's broadly meant to kind create some sort of uniformity. And you and I have colleagues on some campuses where there is no position classification system. It can be like a wild, wild west.

So creating some sense of equity and uniformity is at the heart of that. And the core of what we're creating here is a position description that adequately describes the tasks, the duties, responsibilities, and highlighting those that are essential. So you typically include the major duties, responsibilities, supervisory relationship for a position.

Again, not trying to spell out every detail of everything that position does, but give a general perspective of some of the things that you just mentioned there in terms of general responsibilities,

supervisor responsibilities, risk to the organization, what's routine, what requires decision making by that individual that might stretch it a little further than some other positions on campus.

And I think Anthony's going to give us some great information on some things that he went through recently at the University of Utah related to that. So that's kind of a general framing of what we're talking about with position descriptions overall.

I think one of the challenges for many in managerial positions is that we in HR and others don't do an adequate job of helping them convey the magnitude of the positions, the importance of the positions, and people often get hung up on volume.

Oh, I do 5,000 things instead of these 10 that are essential and transformative for the institution. And that is often a mistake that I've seen when managers attempt to do position descriptions for the first time is it's not as much about volume as impact and decision making for those different duties and responses.

Justin Draeger:

So that's really helpful. I heard you say two things. One is as frustrated as some people might feel about the classification system, it's really there to help provide equity to employees. It's sort of balancing out because if you have the wild west, it's sort of at the whims of the institution as to what they will pay and title people, but with a classification system, it's meant to provide structure and some parity.

So that's good to keep in mind. But the second piece I heard you say is this focus on what you do and then the risk assessment. So I had one national chair who was fond of saying, and she had a relationship with her president where she could say this and still have her job, which was like, "Look, if you don't adequately resource my aid office, if we screw up big enough in my office, we will shut this school down."

In other words, we screw up, we won't get Title IV dollars. Your students will be unhappy and we will not operate. We are dependent on that revenue for operations. From an HR perspective, how do aid offices or directors make the case to HR about I'm sure every position ... Listen, every position believes and rightfully that they are important.

Otherwise that position wouldn't exist but how does an aid office convey that, look, we are dealing with complex federal rules. If we screw up consistently enough or big enough, there's reputational harm to this school and there's real harm to students, parents, and potentially this school's ability to operate.

Andy Brantley:

So one of the things that is often a challenge for many of us in higher education roles is that we're in higher education typically because we have this greater sense of purpose, connection to the mission, connection to what we're trying to do to prepare students for lives of leadership and service.

And we don't do a good enough job of doing exactly what your colleague just described to you in terms of the magnitude of not just risk, but the magnitude of the duties and responsibilities of not just the department, but the job specifically.

And what are the consequences if half of our team turns over? What are the consequences if we're trying to operate at 50% capacity and do all of these things in the same way that we've done them in the past. And actually having, maybe you should have your colleague do a workshop on how to have that kind of conversation, because that is something that we need to do a better job of preparing our colleagues do is have those conversations about the magnitude of what retention challenges are created on our campus and the ramifications for that.

And I recently had a conversation with someone in an academic advising position, and this person was just talking about the similar thing. It's like our leadership doesn't understand that we're operating at partial capacity and they're still expecting us to do all the things that we used to do in the same way that we used to do them and that's not sustainable.

And so I said exactly what you just referenced, said, "How do you share that with your provost? How do you share that with your president?" And part of our call to action now is helping managers be better able to do that.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. And I'll just say one of the things that I've tried to train the managers that I have the honor to work with here at NASFAA is I'm not always aware and presidents aren't always aware. And chief HR folks aren't always aware of what's happening in individual departments.

So if you have reduced capacity, feel free to come up and say, "Here are the 20 things I'm supposed to be doing. I have capacity to do 10 of them. So you help me decide at the current staffing levels what are the 10 things you want done. What are the 10 priorities for this school? Because we can't do 20."

And that's reasonable. And I actually think most presidents and chief HR folks would appreciate that. It's sort of like I'm coming to you with not just the problem, but also I need your help because this is all we can do.

Andy Brantley:

Yeah. I care about the institution. I care about the work. I care about our students. I care about how we are operating as an organization, but my team and I have reached the point where we need your help in prioritizing all of these things that we've been asked to do.

Justin Draeger:

Right. Let me pause for a minute, Andy. We might circle back around to compensation in a moment, but I want to bring Anthony into this conversation because Anthony, you and I talked, I don't know, maybe at the NASFAA conference or yeah, at the NASFAA conference. You went through an exercise on your campus to reclassify several positions in your office. And I wonder if you can describe the situation at the start of the reclassification process. Where did you begin?

Anthony Jones:

Absolutely, Justin. So I'm in the throes of that here at Utah. The one I'm going to talk about was at a previous institution, but the situation there was similar to many schools in that there were two primary concerns.

One was whether the salaries for the administrative and staff positions were competitive. Not only in the market, but also equitable across similar positions at the institution. And namely these were the financial aid counselors, advisors those staff.

The second item was, we noted there were differences in how similar positions were classified as well as the salaries associated with them. We're talking financial aid counselor advisor versus an admissions counselor or an academic advisor. That group we notice variations. One may be at what a classification level C where another one was a D and the position responsibilities seemed similar.

Justin Draeger:

So what led you to this? I'm just curious. Were people leaving the aide office and going to positions that didn't require maybe as much rigor or training and yet making the same amount or more? What was leading you to this discussion?

Anthony Jones:

It was a little of both. People were leaving for those positions, those other positions. As well as others were ... There were complaints. Hey, I've worked with these other folks that I'm working more. I seem to be making less and raising the issue of their level of complexity in their jobs. So it really was just looking at those issues due to the complaints and the turnover we were seeing.

Justin Draeger:

So you dug into this. What did you find in terms of the classifications for your staff?

Anthony Jones:

Well, ultimately we learned that many of the positions in our financial aid office and this was a public institution, so they had originally been reviewed and classified back in the 70s and 80s when the profession in many cases, especially in the 70s was still emerging.

Much of the work for financial aid staff members was very paper based. And was primarily just processing paperwork. The level of the complexity, or as Andy mentioned, the level of decision making that we now deal with wasn't routinely part of the daily responsibilities across a broad swath of the staff members.

That was usually at the managerial or even the executive level. Some of those things I think have changed, and we noticed that were different rather than just forms intake and reviewing forms and processing them are the range of reasons we may have for a dependency override.

Resolving the many ICER comment codes or database mismatches of how to identify and resolve those, understanding changes in household income, projecting household income, the PJ, even for cost of attendance and adapting that on an individual basis. As that expanded, that had to expand across levels.

And it even really looked there became a level of discretion or decision making for staff working at the reception desk because trying to understand how to navigate and were they even asking the right question. Because they may not know what question to ask in order to route that appropriately.

So it really led to a desire to look more deeply into how our positions are classified. Are they representing the current level of responsibility, level of discretion? What the level of work responsibilities distinguish one classification over another or even ranges within a classification. So that's really what led to that.

Justin Draeger:

To contextualize all this, you're talking about classification systems that were created before a FAFSA, before we even had a FAFSA. We're talking BEOG grants. We're not even talking Pell yet, right?

These are systems that were just not only antiquated, but really built around an entirely different institutional makeup and set up, student makeup and set and no way reflected of the modern financial aid office. So as you sought to reclassify these employees, what sort of evidence did you use? What'd you bring to the table?

Anthony Jones:

Well, as we dug in, we used a number of sources. One were NASFAA's benchmarking and salary reports. Because there was a lot of good information in there to sort set us against national norms or standards. We pulled state personnel data on the salary ranges across institutions, maybe within the public system of higher ed at the public institutions, but also our institutional salary ranges for that scope of similar positions.

What did that look like? And then as the fourth aspect of that was looking at what are the position descriptions? What are those requirements, those KSAs, the knowledge, skills, and abilities to determine what are the existing requirements and expectations, just to understand what that was.

And then we started kind judging that against, well, what are our job responsibilities and the office needs? And what are those different roles and needs within the office? We kind of conducted this as though we were documenting what our current office needs were and what we needed the duties to be performed in the office, just to sort of reassess that mindset of man, this has really changed over the years and this isn't really still representing exactly what we need.

And then lastly, we worked with our HR colleagues to understand this what are those rules governing the classification and the pay bans. And ultimately on some of the positions, they did a desk audit to help affirm what we did. Maybe called a desk audit, another place it was called a position audit to ensure the way it was described really was accurate and matched that level.

Justin Draeger:

Andy, when you hear the things that Anthony brought to the table to try to show evidence for these reclassifications, anything missing from that list, anything else you would add to it?

Andy Brantley:

I think that's a great list. Obviously one thing I think is missing is the CUPA HR data that should have supported his work. And hopefully his HR colleagues would've been savvy enough to use our data on demand tools to look at their peer institutions, look at institutions and things like that.

But what he just described I think is a great model for trying to craft not only what is, but what needs to be. And I think that's a great framing for all of us is that as we're thinking about the duties and responsibilities of the financial aid office in those positions, it's not just describing what is, but what should be a part of those skill sets, those competencies, those KSAs, as Anthony just described, knowledge, skills and abilities that should be part of those jobs that we need to be aspiring to, if they're not already part of the skillsets for our team.

Justin Draeger:

And so as people are thinking about how they might approach their leadership, Anthony and Andy have both provided a good model here. And Anthony, I think the million dollar question is did it change anything?

Anthony Jones:

Yeah, fortunately it really did. In this case, nearly half of the positions in the office were reclassified. Of those that were reviewed for and approved for reclassification, all but two received a reclassification up.

Some they changed classification to a level or different classification. Like I said, the majority were classified up due to experience and responsibilities. Some moved within grade, that being the entry and beginning band moved up to a mastery or experienced based on what they were responsible for.

Some changed classifications, such as processing clerk to program manager and a couple of positions did remain the same. None were downgraded, none were eliminated in this. And I think the other piece that I would add to this is naturally I kept the vice chancellor that I reported to updated as I embarked on this.

I kept them updated throughout the project. Because as you could imagine, changing these classifications meant they were eligible for salary changes, but we needed to have a plan to how that might be implemented.

Justin Draeger:

So Anthony, first of all, congratulations to you and the folks that this impacted at your previous institution. But I wonder. So many institutional budgets right now are under distress. We have pretty disparate enrollment issues going on at different sectors of higher education.

I wonder Andy, if it's worth pursuing these sorts of things, if you already know out of the gate, my school has no additional budget. It's been made clear. There's no money to be had. Should they still pursue this? Is this still something ... Or do you just throw in the towel at the beginning here?

Andy Brantley:

So the short answer is yes. You shouldn't use challenges regarding funding as a reason not to do a better job of classifying positions, of describing the duties and responsibilities, of making the case regarding the impact of the financial aid office and those positions, regardless of availability of extraordinary funds.

It's really important that we are advocating the importance of the roles, the impact of the roles, the ensuring that we're adequately describing these positions and acknowledging the contributions of our team.

Justin Draeger:

These two things are tied so hand in hand. What I'm hearing you say is even if you don't have the money now, you still want to accurately classify the position and accurately account for what they are doing and the impact they're having. And Anthony, in your case, you might not have had the budget. The school might not have had the budget immediately, but you can still map a pathway to salary increases later. Is that fair?

Anthony Jones:

Absolutely. And the added benefit was the understanding of staff, your advocacy on their behalf. And Andy spoke previously of beyond salary, the issue of being valued, feeling valued, being part of the team, advocating for appropriate classification or recognition of the complexity of their work, the level of decision making and responsibility that they have had an added benefit to the culture of the office. Even as we were able to say, "Right now, we do not have the funds to make these changes immediately," they knew that that support was there.

Andy Brantley:

So Justin, just if I could also add one of the things that I'm seeing across the country is there are lots of position classification studies going on across the country right now. So small institutions, large institutions, community colleges, doctoral institutions.

So it seems like almost all of my colleagues across the country are engaged in some review of position classifications right now. And I have been encouraged to see that to your point about there's no

money for increases to see acknowledgement from many of our campus leaders that they need to change that mind frame.

That it costs more money for us to lose employees and continue to try to fill those positions and get people up to speed than it would cost to make adjustments to some of those compensation levels. So I'm seeing more acknowledgement that we need to change our mind frame with regard to that because it costs a lot of money.

It can cost 100% or more of the position to have a position that's vacant. So the acknowledgement that we have to rethink and reframe when we say there's no money to do these things, I'm glad to see some of the movement that I'm seeing across the country.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. I'm heartened to hear that too. And ultimately we know there is no money is sort of like a school can feel very distressed by their institutional budget, but at the end of the day, all budget is prioritization, especially on higher education campuses.

The programs are the people. It's a very people centered business that we're all in. The people are the instructors, the people are the student services. And Andy, I don't want to put you on the spot having to answer for all of HR, but I do hear a common thread that I want to give you an opportunity to offer some thoughts on which is that often in financial aid and maybe across student services, there's a feeling that there is so much focus on faculty.

Which, let's face it. Faculty is vital obviously for ... I don't need to say why, but that sometimes student services feels like an afterthought. And I wonder what's your perspective on that?

Andy Brantley:

So first I think that there are probably many areas on campus that could have the same argument. I would make the same argument on behalf of our dining services staff, on behalf of our building services staff, on behalf of our skilled trades, where the turnover is much more extreme than in other areas of campus.

So I think that we often overlook not just student services positions, but a lot of our non-exempt positions across campus too. They are not the focus to the degree that they should be. And so, as it relates to student services, one of the things that I've shared with other student life organizations is that it's so important that we convey as we're trying to recruit and retain student services professionals that the mind frame that some of our current VPs have in terms of, well, in my day, we worked a thousand hours a week and all those things that is not the reality of what today's workforce, those coming into student life positions are expecting in terms of their engagement, in terms of their ... And we have to change that mind frame.

It's not what we "suffered through" back in the day, but it's like, this is the reality of 2022. And are people choosing to leave student services positions? The answer is yes because they don't want the extraordinary workloads and they don't want all of ... I'm thinking resident's life positions specifically that they want a different way to view those jobs. We have to change our mind frame about what work is performed, why it's performed and how it's performed.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. I agree 100% Andy. And when I talk to senior campus leadership, I also say, "And you know what? You can embrace that yourself too." Go find things to do outside of work.

Andy Brantley:

Exactly.

Justin Draeger:

It's actually quite liberating. There is more than work when we were coming up there.

Andy Brantley:

There is.

Justin Draeger:

Anthony, I wonder, and then Andy, I'll ask you the same question, final thoughts. What advice would you give to your colleagues, Anthony, who are about to embark on some reclassification work or a compensation study? What are the things you learn that would be helpful for them? And then Andy, same final thoughts for you. Go ahead, Anthony.

Anthony Jones:

Sure. Yeah. I think the thing that was illuminating for me and that I really learned was just, and it was something that Andy referenced earlier that understanding those different rules of what create distinctions among classifications was important.

I learned through that process, it wasn't necessarily the volume of work or in some cases, not even the complexity of work that affected the changes. It was really that level of discretion, that level of decision making that was there and recognized when it was originally assessed.

Like I said, the profession was very different and being able to document and express what those scopes are now. Because as we looked at, we were able to start categorizing positions from does this deal with prescribed actions only? Or are there discretion among prescribed choices very bounded? Or is there full discretion to assess novel situations and resolve them?

And that's really what helped us when we understood that difference. Oh, okay. Now we can better understand how different positions have those different levels.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. So what I'm hearing you say is it's sort of an unquantifiable thing. It's not how many applications you process. It's does this person, does this position require good judgment? And does the person in this position have good judgment? They have to exercise, they're exercising authority and judgment in some way. That's different than just volume of applications.

Anthony Jones:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Justin Draeger:

Anything else Anthony?

Anthony Jones:

No. Other than, as everybody's recommended, get that team of people. Contact HR, involve your VP to understand and put the data in front of them. CUPA HR, the state, NASFAA, lots of data as benchmarking to compare helps in that process.

Justin Draeger:

Great. Thanks Anthony. Andy final thoughts?

Andy Brantley:

There are six quick things I want to share.

Justin Draeger:

Okay.

Andy Brantley:

First as it relates to our conversation earlier in a collegial collaborative way, our managers have to be bold and communicate the challenges that they and their teams are experiencing. What's happening now with regard to turnover is really, really important part of that.

Two, re-recruit our teams. We have to spend time now understanding and talking to our staff about why they're there, what motivates them, how they want to be a part of the organization moving forward. So re-recruit our teams.

Three reward and express gratitude. Part of this obviously is monetary, but it's not just monetary. We have to show up every day for our colleagues, letting them know how much we appreciate their work, how much we value their work, how much we value them as individuals and how much we appreciate and understand the complexities of their life.

Engage. As we think about those star performers I was referring to earlier, as we're facing challenges and opportunities, are we intentionally engaging our teams in helping solve those problems, in helping resolve those issues so that they feel a part of not just dealing with the issues, but actually creating ways to grapple with things into the future.

Move from talk to action would be the fifth thing. If we're taking time to listen, our employees have to see that we're acting on what they are requesting or they're sharing. Not that we're able to move heaven and earth and make things happen, but that they see that we are moving talk to action.

And then last but not least of these six is give our employees a sense of purpose and community. We all want to know that our work matters. And if we think about that culture thing, there's culture of our institutions, but there's culture within our department.

Some of those cultures are wonderful. Employees thrive. Some of them are toxic and create havoc for the organization. Give our employees a sense of purpose and community. Those small acts of kindness are so important every single day.

Justin Draeger:

I love it. Thanks very much, Andy. Anthony, appreciate both of you coming on. I don't, as you said at the outset, Andy, these are not issues that are going to go away in the next three to six months.

This is going to be an ongoing conversation and we appreciate your insights today. So thanks very much. All right, everybody, thanks very much for tuning into this special August edition of Off the Cuff.

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