

VOICES OF EQUITY PODCAST

Episode 5 Season 2

KEITH BROWN

FEMALE VOICE: (0:00)

The views and opinions expressed by the guest of the Voices of Equity podcasts do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of Lorain County Community College's faculty, staff, and administration.

FEMALE VOICE (singing): (0:11)

We are the voices of equity podcast. We are the voices of equity podcast listen up ... ooh ... ooh... ooh... ooooh listen up.

MUSIC: (0:29)

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS:

(0:36) Thank you for joining us the Voices of Equity Podcasts at Lorain County Community College. We are your Co-hosts Denise Douglas...

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: (0:43)

And Kionna Macintosh Pharms.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (0:46)

As the Co-chairs for the Equity by Design team at LCCC, we are excited to share the work of this team, the voices of those who do this work, and the voices of the students for the reason for our work.

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: (0:56)

Today, we are excited that Mr. Keith Brown, Director of Human Resources and Organizational Development, likewise Lead Title 9 Coordinator has taken some time out of his busy schedule to join us for this podcast. As I often have stated with other guests, we go way back, Mr. Brown. I remember learning about how you started at LCCC as a DIA recipient. This is our common thread as LCCC students. And I'm happy to report that we are still flourishing today. Keith, please share with our listeners more about your background.

KEITH BROWN: (1:38)

My name is Keith Brown and I currently work at Human Resources as a director, but I'm also at the college's Title 9 Coordinator. I've been with the institution now for 22 years, which is very long time. And in that those 22 years, I have had multiple roles. I started off as a security officer and then moved to the director of campus security position, migrated up to human resources where I am now. I was actually a student here from '93 to '98. You know at the time, I didn't think that I would return to the College in any capacity, but I did like it because you know, not only was I student, but I was also a student worker. I had just finished my associates degree in Corrections, and I was deciding between state of Ohio, there was a parole officer position that I applied for. And I was interviewing for a position with the County Sheriff's Office as a corrections officer. So, all of these positions lined up and then the college had a security officer position available. And I applied for all of them and was selected for each. I selected the position at the college as a security officer. It was interesting how life works. I found a home here and still here today.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (2:51)

Wow, what a story. So, I had no idea that you were a student here first. That is awesome. Share a little bit more about how that transition happened for you.

KEITH BROWN: (2:

Sure, when I started off as an officer, my role was pretty much really delegated to providing foot patrols or mobile patrols and ensuring a safe campus. When I started, I

didn't think about going back to school to pursue my four-year degree. But I was thinking, well, we have the university partnership, and they had a public safety management bachelor's degree program. And I took the first class and I think I even got a scholarship through the foundation office. It was like this isn't too bad. You know this is kind of easy and I went through the program, and I finished. It was like three years. From there I was like ok what can I do now? And so, at the time I looked externally because Oberlin College had a security supervisor position available. And at the time our boss was about to retire. I interviewed for that position for the director security position. And I got it! And so, from there it was like, well, I wanted to try to do the things that I always felt our institution needed. There were a lot of things that we tried to implement when I was in security and that now that I look back on it, it was really a good opportunity for me to work with policies and procedures and protocols. I was in security as director of security for about little over 10 years. And then the director of HR on was retiring. And I went to the Vice President at the time and said, you know, I'd like to take a shot at trying to do that. I said it's outside of my wheelhouse. I don't know anything about it, but I'd be willing to learn. He said, you know what? We're gonna give you a shot and see how it works out. It's an entirely different animal. It was really what he told me was your skills are transferable and if you can deal with people in kind of one arena of campus security, then you'll be able to deal with people in human resources as well.

MUSIC: (4:43)

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (4:49)

We're coming up on our 25th anniversary for the university partnership. So yeah, great example of someone who's taken advantage of that and transitioned your career.

KEITH BROWN: (4:59)

I didn't have my sights set on a bachelor's degree when I started working here, but it was really the convenience of it. The scholarship also helped, and so from there when I finished the four-year degree took a couple years off. I worked as director of security and then I really could further distinguish myself if I pursued the master's degree. And it's like

well do I have time to do it? Do I really wanna do it? Balancing that and a full-time job and a family you know was like, well, I don't know if that's something I wanna do. But I took the first class, aced it, and then finished the master's program in like 2 1/2 years. And so, yeah, it was the educational hook kind of hit me when I started working here.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (5:44)

I do see those transferable skills. Between security and HR, you mentioned policy, but what about people?

KEITH BROWN: (5:53)

It's interesting because in security everything was really, it was really black and white. It's either you violate our code of conduct, or you didn't with students. And what I found with employees there can be some gray area. And I you know I attribute this to you know, my predecessor Sidney Lancaster, which she said you know there are a lot of things that you won't have control over and a lot of things you may want to take home with you, She said, remember, at the end of the day, it's always business. It's never personal. In this position, it can be difficult because you build friendships and you have colleagues and when policies and procedures may be violated, there are things that you don't want to do that you have to do. This isn't personal. This is business. You know, that's where that that mantra comes in and begin their aspects of the position that are more difficult than others, obviously. It's a rewarding position. I have support of the President, Dr. Ballinger, as well as the VP's. You know, I have really good colleagues like you Dr. Douglas that I can reach out to when I need assistance or if I need any help.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (7:01)

So, let me go a little bit deeper into some of the human resource aspects, particularly around selection, on-boarding development and retention employees. That's really critical for our functions at the college. But what role do you think equity plays in those functions within HR?

KEITH BROWN:

(7:19)

We use a process called targeted selection, which is a behavioral based interviewing process that really looks at how someone performed in a capacity for a position. And how that person may perform in a future capacity. You know what it does is, you know, we ask the same questions during the interview process of all the candidates. And so, it levels the playing field pretty much for everybody. And so, and this is something that we've done now for, you know, kind of well over a decade. And obviously things have changed a bit. With COVID and with us changing the platform from in person to virtual interviews, and some of those aspects of an interview where you may not be able to look at body language and things of that nature may not come through in a virtual interview, but it's still the same process. Some of the other things that we've done in terms of selection is sort of what we call banned the box. Where we used to ask candidates if they had a felony conviction. We no longer do that. We still do we still conduct background checks. There are a lot of questions in terms of well, if you're not asking that question on the application kind of when you are asking it? It's like, well, once the person is selected for a position, that's when we go through and we conduct that background check to determine if there's anything you know, kind of in in their background. And we found some diverse publications that we can advertise our positions in, which has been for us in attracting, you know, minority candidates, and that's something that the institution has always tried to do was to attract minority candidates. So, whether it's us posting in diverse issues in higher education or selecting a diversity package for the chronicle of higher Ed or inside higher Ed or higher Ed jobs. One of the other things that we've discussed with internally with Staff Council in terms of onboarding employees is providing mentors. Because we provide a very general and high-level overview when we onboard employees. And so, one of the things that we're looking into is having that that sort of mentor role for new employees when they come aboard to our campus. Our sense is that we can provide sort of an almost a warm handoff to the division so that they can get that one on one mentoring in terms of the policies and procedures and protocols of that particular division and area. I think the other thing that we've done is that with the Equity by Design team and providing opportunities for employees to engage in dialogue. You know around issues that are

important to them. With the Commodore Conversations I mean I, I thought that that was phenomenal what you guys did in terms of allowing us to engage in dialogue around matters that are important to us.

MUSIC: (9:50)

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (9:57)

Yeah, so there's so many things that you guys are doing in HR and professional development I love. I want to come back to the banned the box. I did not know about that. I'm impressed that ...

KEITH BROWN: (10:07)

On the old paper application, we asked that question, that the idea behind it was that we didn't want to provide that information to the screening committee as they would clearly see that someone may have a felony conviction that could disrupt the screening process. And you know what we did was went to the then president at the time and said this is something that a lot of institutions are doing, and we think that this is something that we should do and. He agreed, and we eliminated the box, and you know, we haven't had any issues.

KIONNA MCINTOSH-PHARMS: (10:43)

The reason why we created this particular podcast is because we understand that everyone has a story. How does your story connect you to the work of equity at the college?

KEITH BROWN: (10:53)

I would say my story was kind of unique. Most African American males that I know grew up in single parent households. Kind of like what a lot of our students may be single parent. You know these are households headed by females. Mine, on the other hand, was headed by my father. I didn't struggle like a lot of my friends did I wasn't upper middle

class or anything like that, but we were comfortable as a family. I mean there were some struggles early on where my dad was laid off from you know, from some of his jobs and he would work two or three jobs to make ends meet for his family. I saw how my dad struggled. He always told me get an education because that's sort of like the key to your future. When I got here, I was the first-generation college student and my dad just graduated from high school. I didn't have anybody to show me the ropes or tell me what I needed to do in terms of my courses, and it was just me. And so, I had to figure this stuff out all my own and it was either sink or swim. It's like you're here, you need to make the best of it. And fortunately, I had a three-year scholarship, but at the time it was the Diversity Incentive award. Majoring in electrical engineering when I first got here and then switched to corrections. And I didn't have a lot of the structural barriers that a lot of our students do now. When you're talking food insecurity, lack of transportation. I think from my perspective from where I've been to where I am now, and I think about the students that we do have and the students that do have those barriers. I still take it upon myself to kind of know a little bit about each office area or division. So that way if I do have a question, if I can help a student, I know what resource to reach out to her tap into because I think it's incumbent upon all of us as you know, Lorain County Community College employees. to know what those resources are and to help remove those type of structural barriers that our students do face. And so, at the end of the day, if I can do that, then that's what I'm going to do. And I think you know, we as college employees need to have that mindset.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (13:04)

Obviously, there are. It's tough to recruit African American men, Latino men in this kind of profession this discipline, especially now. So, what are your thoughts on that?

KEITH BROWN: (13:16)

I think that's a tough, tough issue, you know, because on one hand, the jobs were plentiful. And I think on the other hand, because you know, I have a 22-year-old. And I've been talking to him about coming back to school and but at the time he just he just wants to work. So, you know whatever it is he wants to do. But I talked to him about law

enforcement. His mindset is that law enforcement wouldn't be a career for me because I don't wanna be seen as a snitch. I think that that's something that is a mindset that's been somewhat pervasive in African American culture for quite some time. And I do know that there is some law enforcement organizations and entities that are trying to recruit more minorities into their ranks. How they're gonna do that is beyond me, but I think these are jobs and positions that will always be there. I've always said if you can get that individual in that leadership position so that others like me can see them, then it might make it more acceptable for them to pursue a career in law enforcement 'cause it really is. It can be a career. Yeah, because we always need police, we'll always need fire, we'll always need EMS and those type of emergency service type of positions. You know you can definitely make a career out of it.

MUSIC: (14:35)

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (14:41)

We can start with our Academy, right? So absolutely Academy here. We want to make sure that that the cadets reflect the diversity of our community and we're doing a great job with that. Commander Thomas is doing a great job with that, but there's always room to improve so I may be calling on you for...

KEITH BROWN: (14:57)

And I actually. I have noticed that there has been more diversity in the ranks of the cadets. And you know, I like the fact that I've seen female cadets as well. And some of them the previous academies there may have been one. And I think this the most recent one had, I think it was like three I saw and so yeah, I was, I was pleasantly surprised.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: (15:19)

There's been a number of challenges recently that impacted those who lead HR functions and in organizations. Particularly around what externally is being called the great resignation. But there are many challenges just because of the way in which we view

were changing. And our college is just a microcosm of the larger society. So, with all of the challenges that HR professionals like yourself are facing out there, where do you kind of draw your inspiration? How do you kind of move forward in a way that helps you deal with those challenges and those opportunities?

KEITH BROWN:

(15:56)

So, I will first and foremost, I draw inspiration from my family. You know, I've got a wife and two sons. That's sort of like my daily inspiration. But I also think, and I remember, you know Dr. Ballinger and she said, you know, we're so very proud of you. You know, and Dr. Ballinger and I have always had a really good relationship. I kind of grew up here and she's you know she's been here as long as I have. She really instilled confidence in me. I've always felt like if she's willing to take a risk on me as an individual, then I'll do whatever I can for Lorain County Community College. I took on the role of Title 9 Coordinator because it was something that the institution needed. And I just I was willing to do it. I've got really good colleagues like you, the administrative leadership team. If I ever need any advice or guidance or assistance, these are people that that I can reach out to. And so, I think just knowing that I have support, and people that count on me is all the inspiration that I need. You know, when I usually come in, I try to do something good for somebody every day. My boss John Volpe who is the Vice President, he recognizes that one of the things that I always do is when somebody says thank you to me always say my pleasure. And it kind of catches people off guard when you do stuff like that. And so that's one of the things that I try to do is try to stay positive. Despite you know kind of what's going on around me and kind of see, or at least try to make lemonade out of lemons when you know kind of life throws those type of situations at you.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS:

(17:35)

I can attest to that. I love when you say that. And it's such a pleasure, always working with you. And we just happen to also be together in the OACC Leadership Academy. Any thoughts on your experience so far?

KEITH BROWN:

(17:45)

Yeah, it's interesting, because again, I'm not in a student facing position. All of that is foreign to me but learning about meta majors. And the role that academic advising plays, and these maps, these career plans that that student can really engage in now. Seeing what steps institutions are taken to ensure completion and success and sustainable wages when students graduate is just phenomenal. I mean, I think back to my time as a student and I didn't know you know these resources existed, but it's intentional on our part now to try to shower our students with the resources and services that we do have to ensure you know their success and their completion. And again, I've always said I've always wanted to get on the student side of the institution, in the sort of the latter part of my career, 'cause really, you know, I've got like 10 years to go until I retire. And so, you know, I'm starting to see that with this OACC Student Leadership Academy, and I've been fortunate again to be selected in that cohort with you as well as others from around the state. It'll be interesting to see what comes out as in terms of our project that we're working on, because what we're looking at is trying to determine how students' schedules can better be implemented using the voice of the student. Our thinking was that for the longest time now, professors have dictated what the college course schedule looks like and the hours that courses are available. Our thinking is that if to students had a voice, they would let us know, you know, kind of when the best time to take courses and what days would be best for them to take courses and so I think that's the direction that you know we're gonna try to pursue.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS:

(19:38)

Sounds like a great project and wherever you are in this institution is gonna be great. So, we're just happy to have you here. And we want to thank you for joining us today. Also, wanna thank our listeners for joining us for this episode of the Voices of Equity podcast at LCCC. Brought to you by Boom Radio.

MUSIC:

(19:56)